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Kuhnian Revolutions and Interpretive Methodology in the Theatre of Harold Pinter

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Abstract

This thesis adapts and applies Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigmatic scientific revolutions, as outlined in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, to the plays of Harold Pinter. After introductory remarks, Chapter Two outlines the paradigm concept and posits post-war British theatre as an example of a paradigm, with specific reference to Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* and Christie's *The Mousetrap*. Chapter Three discusses the importance of anomalies within the paradigm concept, both as a spur for further expansion and development, and as a means of bringing about a questioning of the basis of the paradigm itself. The work of J.B. Priestley and T.S. Eliot is given as examples of theatrical work attempting to solve a theatrical anomaly via experimentation with non-dominant paradigm techniques of stagecraft. Chapter Four introduces Kuhnian Crisis as the period of flux when no one paradigm predominates, and suggests that 1950s British theatre exhibits this state. Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is discussed as an example of theatre attempting to break away from dominant paradigmatic forms. Chapter Five studies the works of Harold Pinter, considering his dramaturgy as comprising a new paradigmatic dramatic form, with specific reference to *The Homecoming*, *Betrayal* and *One for the Road*. Chapter Six discusses the concept of incommensurability between paradigms, whereby proponents of conflicting paradigms may be said to hold different criteria for (com)prehending reality. The difficulties inherent in interpreting and producing Pinter's plays in atmospheres of incommensurability are here discussed with reference to *The Homecoming*, *Moonlight*, *Ashes to Ashes* and *Celebration*. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the potential benefits of the paradigm model as an interpretive tool for the theatre practitioner.

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"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

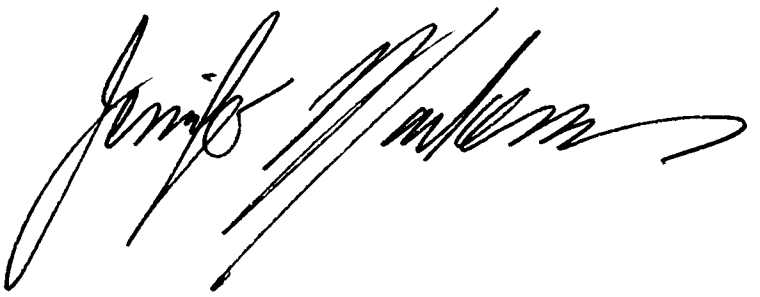
1 Corinthians, 13:4-7

Author's Declaration:

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Bristol.

The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Signed: 

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1. Introduction

This dissertation attempts the construction of a theatrical methodology which both clarifies and builds upon conventional narrations of 20th century British theatre history. The change and development of theatre in this period, especially in the mid-1950s, is in general described in terms of revolutionary terminology. The new methodology will attempt to formalise this 'revolutionary' approach, creating criteria by which to recognise and describe different theatrical forms and 'movements', achieved through the study and adaptation of Thomas Kuhn's writings on the 'revolutionary' movements between scientific theories. It is posited that a parallel may be drawn between the relationship that exists between competing scientific theories and that amidst different forms and means of theatrical production. The effectiveness of the new methodology created through the adaptation of Kuhn's work to a theatrical context shall be demonstrated through the example of the works of Harold Pinter. This introduction, after a discussion of the reasons why a new methodology may be thought necessary, gives a preliminary exposition to the writings of Thomas Kuhn, and culminates in an overview of the current state of studies on Pinter with a view to explaining why the use of Pinter as the primary example of the new methodology at work may also constitute a furtherance of Pinter studies.

1.1 In Pursuit of a Methodology

The necessity of a new methodology by which to discern and assess new theatrical forms is highlighted both by the history of 20th century British theatre and the history of the criticism which accompanies it. Just as the history of the theatre is usually divided into two main sections, pre- and post-*Anger*, so too may the criticism of this period be seen in two distinct 'periods': an 'orthodox' view contemporaneous with the 'revolution' created by *Look Back in Anger*, and a more recent re-examination, begun in earnest in the last five years, which aims to reassess the principles and assumptions upon which the 'orthodox' views were founded. It has become almost a truism to

note that most orthodox criticism of British theatre of the last century is couched in language of revolutionary change, particularly with regard to discussion of such plays as *Waiting for Godot* and *Look Back in Anger*, and more widely, to describe the activities of the English Stage Company (ESC) at the beginning of their existence.[1] One book on the period by Katharine Worth is entitled *Revolutions in Modern English Drama*, while others use either the opening date of *Godot* or *Look Back in Anger* as a virtually uncrossable dividing line between what is critically interesting and what is not.[2] In his introduction to the criticism of the era, Rebellato has noted a number of interrelated problems inherent in the approach of the 'orthodox' criticism to pre- and post-*Anger* theatre. The first, apparently terminological, is the tendency for commentators upon the period to veer between describing British theatre as being changed by *Look Back in Anger*, or alternatively as being destroyed by it. Taylor, for example, uses both images in the introductory chapters of *Anger and After* to describe the impact of Osborne's play:

> The whole picture of writing in this country has undergone a transformation in the last six years or so, and the event which marks 'then' off decisively from 'now' is the first performance of *Look Back in Anger*...
>
> If ever a revolution began with one explosion it was this...[3]

Though an apparently minor confusion of terminology, the question of whether pre-*Anger* British theatre (more strenuously defined later in this dissertation as the West End paradigm) had been changed or destroyed by *Look Back in Anger* and its contemporaries points to a larger confusion, that of critical indecision over just how much the 'new' theatre could be said to have had its genesis in the techniques, forms and practicalities of what had gone before. This indecision is highlighted in the critical predilection for emphasising the speed of the effect which *Look Back in Anger* had upon the

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[1] Lacey, S., *British Realist Theatre: the New Wave in its Context 1956-65*, London, 1995, p.1; Rebellato, D., *1956 And All That*, London, 1999, p.9.

[2] Worth, K.J., *Revolutions in Modern English Drama*, London, 1973; Taylor, J.R., *Anger and After*, rev. ed., Harmondsworth, 1963; Hayman, R., *British Theatre Since 1955: A Reassessment*, Oxford, 1979.

[3] Taylor, *op.cit.*, pp.11, 16. Also Rebellato, *op.cit.*, pp.8-9.

theatre's audiences and practitioners. In spite of its frequent description as 'explosive', Osborne's play could be described rather as slow-burning, for in fact the play took some months to find any substantial audience. The apparent critical imperative for over-emphasising the speed of *Look Back in Anger*'s acceptance perhaps has its origins in a need to underline the significance of the change that had taken place in theatre. Critics tried to account for the change by searching for a criterion or quality that could be demonstrated to be present in the new post-*Anger* theatre but lacking in what had gone before. This quality was named Anger, a somewhat hazily defined term describing a spirit of revolt against societal apathy and right wing political traditionalism; Jimmy Porter was, unsurprisingly, Anger's archetype. The Anger in Osborne's play was, therefore, the distinguishing factor of the 'new' theatre; Rebellato suggests that the West End theatre becomes characterised by Anger's absence, an absence that contains within it an implicit negative valuation, for if the new and exciting theatre is made so by its Anger, then its absence constitutes a devaluing characteristic.[4] Perhaps more damaging than this definition of post-*Anger* or New Wave theatre is that such an identification fails to account for the tremendous difference between the various works that appeared contemporary to *Look Back in Anger*. As shall be discussed in Chapter 3, Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, for example, or Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* are significantly different to Osborne's play in a number of aspects, but by virtue of their performance at the Royal Court soon after Osborne's success, may inadvertently have become swept into the catch-all revolutionary 'New Wave' or post-*Anger* generation through temporal coincidence. The lack of criteria describing the New Wave approach to plot, character, dialogue, staging and so on deprives such works of the opportunity of further critical evaluation that a series of more rigorous and more closely defined analyses may provide.

The wish to separate, by explosions or Anger or by other means, the West End theatre from the post-*Anger* era is also marked by a critical desire to downplay any roots that the new theatre may have had in the old. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this brand of critical amnesia has resulted in

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[4] Rebellato, *op.cit.*, p.4.

something of a lack of awareness of the lengthy professional connections held by many members of the ESC's artistic staff and board. Similarly, in *Anger and After* Taylor's chapter on possible antecedents and 'early skirmishes' prior to the revolution begun by *Anger* is careful to find little of note that could be considered as a true ancestor on an artistic level to the achievements of the post-*Anger* movement:

> Now, who does that leave us? On the stage, at least, no one very much except Denis Cannan and John Whiting ... So that was the London theatre between the Festival [of Britain] and *Look Back in Anger*.[5]

This denigration of pre-*Anger* theatre and the denial of any element of post-*Anger* theatre having pre-*Anger* origins may serve to increase the impressiveness of the vitality of post-*Anger* theatre and its achievements, but places critics in a quandary, for emphasis on the 'explosiveness' of the new movement and its relative lack of artistic or professional antecedents also denies post-*Anger* theatre a degree of legitimacy and historicity. These are the two forces that pull at orthodox critical readings of 20th century British theatre history: the need for the 'explosiveness' of the impact of post-*Anger* theatre with its resultant rootlessness, and the legitimacy of the recognition of the movement's artistic and professional debt to the pre-*Anger* theatre but with a resultant relative de-emphasis of the remarkable nature of the post-*Anger* theatrical forms. Recent critical re-examinations of the period still concentrate on this dichotomy. Duff, for example, in *The Lost Summer* attempts to circumvent the problems of the dichotomy by attempting a re-analysis of the importance of pre-*Anger* theatre, wishing to raise it from the level of critical unimportance at which it has for so long been placed. Perhaps the most potentially valuable of recent critical approaches is that of Rebellato, who provides an analysis of the ways in which the later theatrical forms were related to pre-*Anger* theatre in specific areas such as politics and patriotism.[6] Rebellato's analysis works to provide an altered perspective and explication of the relationships between the two forms. Nevertheless, it remains the case that in all major criticism on the era the existence of the

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[5] Taylor, *op.cit.*, pp.22, 26.

[6] See Rebellato, *op.cit.*; Duff, C., *The Lost Summer: the Heyday of the West End Theatre*, London, 1995; Lacey, S., *op.cit.*

'revolutionary' dichotomy is taken as a given. In this dissertation I wish to address the question of why such a dichotomy occurs, not only during large scale and rapid changes between theatrical forms, but when considering the relationships between different play forms within such a period of change, as, for example, the work of Osborne and Pinter. This is achieved through the construction of a methodology with criteria capable of application to theatrical forms both from play to play and from 'movement' to 'movement'.

Able to assist in the definition of criteria necessary for the creation of such a theatrical methodology are such books as Esslin's *Theatre of the Absurd* and Itzin's *Stages in the Revolution*, which attempt the definition and explication of particular theatrical forms, such as 'absurdist' or political drama.[7] Though Martin Esslin has insisted that his study *The Theatre of the Absurd* was never intended to define a new theatrical movement but rather to draw parallels between certain technical elements in the works of a number of writers, Theatre of the Absurd has become a standard critical umbrella to encompass those works which do not have realistic sets or dialogue and which deal with subject matter that is broadly existentialist in its philosophical leanings. The importance of Esslin's study to this dissertation lies in the reason he elaborates for attempting his study: the belief that a logical and reasoned analysis of the similarities between works by such writers as Ionesco, Beckett and Pinter would aid audience members and practitioners in the recognition and understanding not simply of these writers' plays, but any play which exhibited similar characteristics.

> Most of the incomprehension with which plays of this type are still being received... come[s] from the fact that they are part of a new and still developing stage convention that has not yet been generally understood and has hardly ever been defined. Inevitably, plays written in this new convention will, when judged by the standards and criteria of another, be regarded as impertinent and outrageous impostures. If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of ... But the plays we are concerned with here pursue ends quite different from those of the conventional play and therefore use quite different methods. They can be judged only by the standards of the Theatre of the Absurd...[8]

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[7] Itzin, C., *Stages in the Revolution*, London, 1980; Esslin, M., *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3rd ed., London, 1991.

[8] Esslin, *op.cit.*, pp.21-22.

If audience and practitioners are to improve their understanding of Absurdist plays, Esslin suggests, they must be provided with criteria by which this may be achieved, so as to distinguish between different theatrical forms. Esslin here notes that not only are theatrical movements or conventions (or, later in this dissertation, paradigms) defined by criteria such as plot, character, dialogue and stagecraft, but that these criteria may differ wildly between different conventions. It is this fact that may cause difficulties in the acceptance of a play which uses an unfamiliar set of conventions. These same criteria that may be used to identify a play as being an example of a particular form or convention also provide the means by which the play may be evaluated, via the degrees to which the play meets, explicates or extends the criteria of its form.[9] The misguided evaluation of a play using the characteristics of a convention or movement to which it does not belong, Esslin intimates, both undervalues the work in question and retards critical understanding. Unfortunately, having made these important foundational statements regarding the methodology of his study, Esslin's work suffers from being to some extent trapped between the analytical rigour entailed by his methodological statements and his earlier stated desire not to be responsible for the rigid definition of a theatrical movement. Additionally, Esslin casts his analytical net so wide in attempting to define the Theatre of the Absurd, that he is capable of defining only a few criteria which the plays all exhibit: an expression of the senselessness of the human condition, and the integration of this subject matter and its means of presentation (devaluation of language and character, and non-realistic settings and given circumstances).[10]

In summary, this brief overview of criticism of 20th century British theatre has suggested the following criteria for a theatrical methodology:

- It must explicate a revolutionary narrative of theatre history, reclaiming this term so as to take into account both the antecedents of a new theatrical form and its innovations.

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[9] This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

[10] Esslin, *op.cit.*, pp.22, 24-6.

- It must work equally well on broad sweeps of history as well as in the explication of different playwriting forms within an historical change.
- It has as its underlying principle that the analysis of criteria of playwriting and stagecraft enable the recognition and elaboration of a movement or theatrical form by both audience members and practitioners.
- These criteria must enable the reasoned evaluation of the success (or otherwise) of a play in contributing to or expanding the form it exhibits.

Facing similar criteria in his studies in the fields of the philosophy and history of science, Thomas Kuhn formed a methodology which provides this dissertation with a framework of approach.

1.2 Thomas Kuhn

Scientific thought and concepts have become increasingly popular in the humanities as sources of explication, with various fields of scientific research being mined for analogies and conceptual inspiration for, amongst other disciplines, philosophy, linguistics and psychoanalysis.[11] Scientific theories have also made appearances in theatre, both onstage in such works as Stoppard's *Hapgood* and *Arcadia* and Frayn's *Copenhagen*, as well as in theatre criticism.[12] Such usage is generally confined to analogy, as, for example, in Stoppard's *Hapgood*, in which the concept of quantum wave/particle duality is used as an analogy for the slipperiness of spies and love.[13] Having made in my own Honours thesis similar analogies between aspects of the world view implicit in (comparatively) recent theoretical

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[11] It has been suggested that not all of these usages of scientific discourse in such fields make sufficient attempt to understand the intricacies of the theories used. See Sokal, A. & Bricmont, J., *Intellectual Impostures*, London, 1997.

[12] Phelan, P., 'Theatre and Its Mother: Tom Stoppard's *Hapgood*' in *Unmarked*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp.112-129; Fuegi, J., 'The Uncertainty Principle and Pinter's Modern Drama' in Gale, S.H.., ed., *Harold Pinter: Critical Approaches*, Cranbury, 1986, pp.202-207; Regal, M.S., *Harold Pinter: A Question of Timing*, London, 1995.

[13] Phelan, *op.cit.*, p.113.

physics such as relativity and quantum theory with technical aspects of Pinter's playwriting, I began to question whether analogy was as deep as the relationship between science and theatre could be stretched.[14] It was after beginning to read the philosophy of Thomas Kuhn that it became clear that the underlying structures of theatre – both the different forms or conventions in each discipline and the relationships between those conventions– could be compared with the underlying structures of scientific thought, for it is these structures with which Kuhn is concerned.

The historian and philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn was catapulted into prominence with the publication in 1962 of his most famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, which conducted an articulate attack on the positivistic philosophies of science promulgated by such philosophers as Popper and Carnap.[15] Popper's philosophy of science, as expounded in his book *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, held that scientific research was a rules-based activity where advances were made in a progressive fashion through the falsification of hypotheses. That is to say, Popper considered that any proposition about a scientific property could be held true only so long as there was no observational or experimental evidence that suggested the contrary. For example, the movement of the planets and stars in the sky was explained by the theory that all heavenly bodies revolved around the Earth until Galileo's discovery, using his telescope, of moons orbiting the planet Jupiter. The inclusion of new observational data necessitated the creation of a new theory which was able to, in this case, account for the movement of heavenly bodies which did not necessarily revolve around the Earth. In other words, the advance of astronomical knowledge and the creation of a Solar-centred (Copernican) astronomical system may be considered directly attributable to the falsification of the Earth-centred Ptolemaic system by observational data.[16]

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[14] McInnes, J., *The Physics of Pinter: developing a new interpretive method for the plays of Harold Pinter*, BA(Hons) thesis, Department of Theatre Studies, University of New England, 1995.

[15] Kuhn, T.S., *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970. (Hereafter referred to as *SSR*)

[16] For a summary of falsificationism see Chalmers, A.F., *What is This Thing Called Science?* 2nd ed., Buckingham, 1996, pp.38-49; Popper, K.R., *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, rev. ed.,

Kuhn's work addresses certain difficulties inherent in Popper's falsificationist philosophy. For example, unlike the relatively calm and rational view of the scientist and science pictured by Popper, changes in theory may be the subject of intense resistance. Such changes as that from the Ptolemaic to Copernican astronomical system rarely happen overnight, and even more rarely without controversy; Galileo's theories were considered to be so dangerous to society by the Church that he was tried and imprisoned for heresy. This would indicate that, rather than the smooth and reasoned transition from one theory to another implied in falsificationism, scientists are proprietorial about the theories under whose auspices they conduct research, and are unwilling to discard them.[17] Using examples from scientific history, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Kuhn demonstrates a new model of science which accounts for this behaviour, in which a scientific theory (or group of related theories) becomes dominant in a particular field of science. In this state of dominance, called Normal Science by Kuhn, scientists work on solving problems and anomalies that are suggested by the dominant theory and its related applications, laws and methodologies, termed a *paradigm* by Kuhn. As time progresses scientists will uncover increasing numbers of anomalies for which research cannot find a solution within the boundaries of the dominant paradigm. At this point of Crisis, individual scientists will begin to experiment with different theories and approaches, one or many of which will begin to gain adherents. This may in some ways be likened to the development of allegiances to political parties. If any one fledgling theory demonstrates ability to solve the anomalies of the previous paradigm as well as providing the scope for further scientific exploration and paradigmatic expansion, this new paradigm may eventually become the new Normal Science. Each chapter of this dissertation examines a different area of the Kuhnian revolutionary structure and the ways in which it may be applied to theatre. Chapter 2 defines the paradigm concept, using 'pre-*Anger*' West End theatre as a theatrical example of a paradigm, while Chapters 3

London, 1974, especially pp.40-101. Popper's theory was itself a reaction to inductive logic and its inherent problems. For a discussion of the 'problem of induction' see Lakatos, I., ed., *The Problem of Inductive Logic: Proceedings of the International Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science, London 1965 volume 2*, Amsterdam, 1968.

[17] Kuhn, *op.cit.*, pp.6-7.

and 4 examine the course of such a paradigm through Normal Science and Crisis periods. Chapter 3 discusses the importance of anomalies both in the continued expansion of the paradigm through its Normal Science phase when it is dominant, and as the means by which a paradigm begins to be questioned. Anomalies that are consistently unsolved within the paradigm gradually become the subject of increasingly non-paradigmatic researches, leading to the creation of contestatory paradigms. In Chapter 4 'Post-*Anger*' or New Wave theatre is posited as the manifestation of Crisis in 20th century British theatre, in which the previously dominant West End paradigm is challenged by potential candidates for future paradigmatic status and possibly even Normal Science dominance; Harold Pinter's early plays are given as an example of just such a potential paradigm candidate. Chapter 5 goes on to discuss the criteria discernible in Pinter's works which demonstrate that they have developed into a mature paradigm of their own, while Chapter 6 discusses issues related to communication between paradigms. The significance of my choice of Pinter and his oeuvre as a paradigm in their own right is a matter discussed in the following section.

1.3 Harold Pinter

Harold Pinter and his plays have been the subject of intense critical scrutiny, almost since the very beginning of his career. There is such a body of work written on Pinter, indeed, that it is now an accepted critical strategy to attempt to gain insights into Pinter's work by conducting analyses of the body of Pinter criticism itself.[18] Perhaps the most lasting form of Pinter criticism is that made exemplary in the work of Martin Esslin's *Pinter: the Playwright*, that of the chronological study. Often beginning with a biography of the playwright, such a book generally embarks on a discussion of the plays in chronological order so as to encompass any discernible characteristics that may occur across the body of the work. These studies may combine this chronological explication with a discussion of a particular theme or mode of

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[18] Merritt, S.H., *Pinter in Play: Critical Strategies and the Plays of Harold Pinter*, Durham, 1990.

analytical approach, as with Regal's study of Pinter's use of time or Esslin's gently psychoanalytical approach. The difficulty faced by such studies is that the nature of the growth and experimentation in Pinter's work prevents an easy holistic analysis, for the plays cannot in any way be said to be easily tractable under any one form of analysis, whether it be merely thematic, or via a tool such as psychoanalysis. Regal's study on the conception of time in Pinter's plays, for example, is particularly informative when analysing the later plays, but has difficulty when discussing earlier plays such as *The Birthday Party* or *The Caretaker*, as these works do not exhibit the complex time structures of later works such as *Old Times*, and are thus far less tractable under Regal's means of analysis.[19] It is perhaps this feature of Pinter's writing that has contributed to the near solidification of the broad categories into which his works have been placed: the 'comedies of menace' and the 'memory' plays are two examples. Though the grouping together of certain works in order to demonstrate congruences of technique and subject matter has provided many important insights into Pinter's playwriting, the overall effect of these categorisations has been to break Pinter's oeuvre into a set of pigeonholes that implicitly discourage attempts to analyse the works as an artistic whole. Austin Quigley has recognised that a major difficulty with analysis of Pinter's work, whether in plot, character, or structure, resides in the "uncertainty over where and how to generalize": that is to say, that previous attempts at such an enterprise have faltered as a result of a lack of a methodology and resultant criteria through which an analysis may be structured. Through the adoption of Kuhn's description of the methodology of scientific revolutions and using Kuhn's concepts of the kinds of criteria that are required for the recognition of paradigms, in this dissertation I wish to suggest that a methodology of theatrical paradigmatic revolutions is precisely the tool that enables, indeed encourages a holistic analysis of Pinter's work. This analysis not only details the particular constituent

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[19] For example, having delineated in his Introduction the various ways in which he believes Pinter's work utilises complex subjectual time structures as a means of dramatic presentation, in the very first sentence of his first chapter Regal admits that Pinter's earliest works have a unity of action and a naturalistic time flow, a statement that negates much of what has been said only pages earlier, and forces Regal to bend his analysis of time in the plays to include pauses and silences and a discussion of the oddities of Goldberg's Fridays in *The Birthday Party*. Regal, *op.cit.*, pp.4, 9, 12-13, 22.

elements of playwriting technique and stagecraft that are consistent across Pinter's work and provides a means by which future works written in the paradigm, both by Pinter and by others, may be evaluated, but also provides a means of siting Pinter's plays in the context of 20th century British theatre. Chapter 2, as stated previously, is concerned with the explication of the paradigm concept, using post-World War I, but more particularly post-World War 2 West End theatre as an example of a paradigm with specific reference to two plays, Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* and Christie's *The Mousetrap*. After a brief discussion of the period of stability known as Normal Science, in Chapter 3 the works of J.B. Priestley and T.S. Eliot are given as examples of anomalous theatre; that is, theatre which attempts to find non-paradigmatic solutions to anomalies within the West End paradigm. Chapter 4 examines the development of Crisis, applying the Kuhnian concept to British theatre of the late 1950s, a period characterised by the proliferation of different theatrical forms penned by new writers. Following the analysis of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* as an example of a contestatory paradigm produced in Crisis, Chapter 5 comprises a study of the works of Harold Pinter, discussing the criteria which define the works as a new paradigmatic dramatic form. Chapter 6 introduces the concept of incommensurability, a term used by Kuhn to describe the difficulty of communication and understanding between paradigms which is produced as a result of the differing constituent criteria of each paradigm, and the differing world views that result from them. The reception of Pinter's plays in theatrical (newspaper) criticism and the challenges to acting methodologies that the plays present are posited as examples of the consequences of incommensurability upon the Pinter paradigm.

2. Paradigms and West End Theatre

Paradigms are the keystone of Thomas Kuhn's concept of scientific revolutions and, according to Kuhn, are the *sine qua non* of science, for without an over-arching body of intertwined theoretical and methodological belief the scientist would not be able to hypothesise about the nature of reality. The paradigm provides the scientist with theoretical criteria by which natural phenomena may be viewed and categorised; methodological principles, from which the scientist may discern which research is valuable and what equipment and techniques may be used in its solutions; and exemplars, models with which the scientist may teach the principles of the paradigm to others. I explore these various elements of the scientific paradigm in the first half of this chapter. I then wish to generate criteria, based on those listed by Kuhn as being fundamental to a scientific paradigm, which may be considered the general constituents of a theatrical paradigm, an artistic formulation of conventions regarding playwriting and staging which create productions that serve to generate representations (or hypotheses) of reality. These criteria are applied to British theatre of approximately 1935 – 1956, an era characterised by a dominant homogeneous theatrical form: plays that straddle Scribean and naturalistic structures of plotting and characterisation, produced in the West End and toured in repertory. Christie's *The Mousetrap* and Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* are discussed as exemplars of what will be termed the West End paradigm, as these plays exhibit all of the important criteria of which the paradigm may be said to be comprised.

2.1 Kuhnian Paradigms

In Section 2.1 I shall discuss the criteria which Kuhn discerns as being central to the definition of a paradigm. Section 2.1.1 examines the paradigm constituent considered by Kuhn to be the most important to the definition of the paradigm concept, the exemplar. Sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 consider those paradigm constituents that are demonstrated to be logically consequent from

the exemplar: firstly in Section 2.1.2 the more practically-based elements of application, experimentation and instrumentation, followed in Section 2.1.3 by laws, theories and methodologies.

2.1.1 Paradigms and Exemplars

In the preface to his 1977 book *The Essential Tension*, Kuhn remarks upon the origins of the paradigm concept in language studies, and its usage in this context heavily informs Kuhn's utilisation of the term. In language studies a paradigm is conceived as a set of inflections intended to be representative of the behaviour of a particular noun or verb group.[1] The set of inflections functions as an exemplar; it is both a standard by which to categorise nouns and verbs, and an entry point into an understanding of the category. For example, one may use the exemplar of Latin first conjugation verbs (amo, amas, amat etc.) both as a test for a verb of unknown conjugation in an attempt to determine its category, or as a means of understanding the inflections of the first conjugation verbs when the category is known but its morphology is not.

Kuhn expands upon the linguistic origins of the paradigm concept, using it as a means of linking paradigms and their attendant exemplars to issues of human perception, with the assistance of psychological research and Wittgensteinian philosophy of language.[2] In order to illustrate his proposition that paradigms are entailed by the perception and evaluation of phenomena, Kuhn refers to a 1949 psychology experiment which tested human perceptiveness towards anomalous or confusing stimuli. Experimental subjects were asked to identify playing cards that were shown to them, but were not informed that there were anomalous cards in the deck, for example, a red six of spades. At first the subjects were not able to correctly identify the anomalous cards, instead perceiving them as normal

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[1] Kuhn, T.S., *The Essential Tension*, Chicago, 1977, p. xix. (Hereafter referred to as *ET*) 'Inflection' is a term used in the morphological branch of linguistics, and is a word form that expresses a particular grammatical change in a language. A verb, for example, may be 'inflected' to form a past tense, as with *walk* and *walked*. Hudson, R., *Invitation to Linguistics*, Oxford, 1984, pp. 62-64.

[2] Kuhn, *SSR*, pp.16-17.

members of the pack, assigning, for example, the anomalous red six of spades either to the category of hearts or to spades, both categories within their previous experience. Without prior exposure to the anomalous playing cards, the subjects did not have an example from past experience upon which they could draw, and so failed to recognise the anomaly. Only on continued exposure to the deck were most subjects able to recognise the anomalous cards; on closer examination they identified the red six of spades as being of its own category. Kuhn describes the significance of the experiments as follows:

> Surveying the rich experimental literature from which these examples are drawn makes one suspect that something like a paradigm is prerequisite to perception itself.[3]

Wittgenstein touches upon this relation between paradigm and perception in his discussion of the 'duck-rabbit' figure (see Figure 2.1), a picture-puzzle-style drawing which can be interpreted as either a duck or a rabbit. Wittgenstein notes the significance of the diagram:

> You only 'see the duck and rabbit aspects' if you are already conversant with the shapes of those two animals. There is no analogous condition for seeing the aspects A.[4]

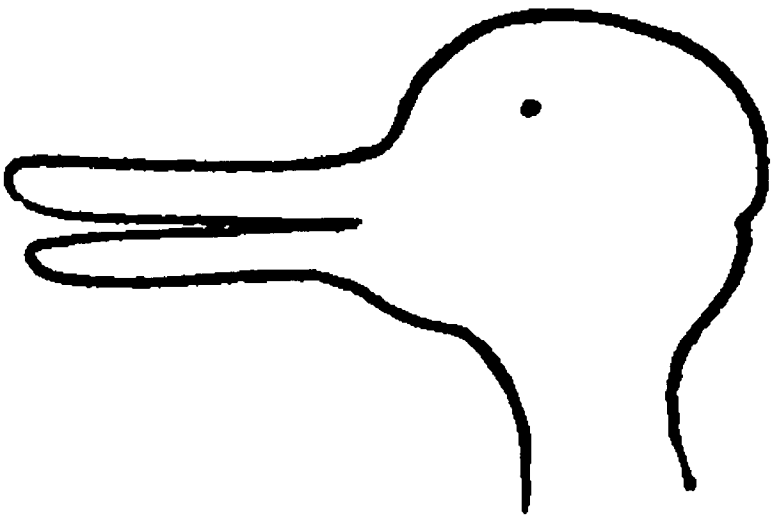

Figure 2.1 Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit figure.[5]

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[3] *ibid.*, p.113; Bruner, J.S. & Postman, L., 'On the Perception of Incongruity: a Paradigm', *Journal of Personality*, XVIII (1949), pp.206-23.

[4] Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., Oxford, 1995, p.207. (Hereafter referred to as *PI*. Note that I shall cite references to Part I of this work using paragraph numbers, but will use page numbers when citing from Part II.)

[5] Wittgenstein, *op.cit.*, p.194.

Being 'conversant' with the rabbit depiction is equivalent to holding a concept of a rabbit[6], and it is this concept (or paradigm) that anchors our understanding. Thomas Kuhn makes a similar point in his discussion on the function of exemplars in childhood language development. Kuhn's analogy takes place in a zoological garden, where a father is teaching his young son to recognize certain species of birds. The son begins the day with a crude concept of birdlife: he can discriminate between a bird and a cow, but not between a swan and a goose. The lesson proceeds in the following manner:

> Father points to a bird, saying, "Look, Johnny, there's a swan." A short time later Johnny himself points to a bird ... He has not yet, however, learned what swans are and must be corrected: "No, Johnny, that's a goose." ... After a few more such encounters ... Johnny's ability to identify these waterfowl is as great as his father's.[7]

The important point to note here is that, though by the end of the lesson Johnny is correctly identifying species of birdlife that he could not previously distinguish, he has been taught to do so without recourse to any ostensive definitions or correspondence rules. Though he may extrapolate definitions of the bird species at a later date, his understanding of the exemplars is prior to this activity. His father has given him no criteria for identifying each bird species, 'swans have long necks' and the like. Johnny is fully able to use his new-found expertise in birdlife identification based purely on the examples of the birdlife he was shown, examples which are common to the speech community in which he resides.[8] Wittgenstein points out that our learning and subsequent use of language is not based upon private ostensive definition, but upon exemplars, and the language use of the speech community around us.

> How do I know that this colour is red? - It would be an answer to say: "I have learned English".[9]

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[6] Merleau-Ponty would here suggest that all intellection is rooted in perception; that is, in the lived body as subject and point of view of the world. Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phenomenology of Perception*, London, 1962, pp.203ff; Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1995, p.484.

[7] Kuhn, *ET*, p.309.

[8] *ibid.*, p.312.

[9] Wittgenstein, *PI*, §381; §377, §380. Readers may find parallels between this aspect of Wittgenstein's approach to meaning and that associated with Jaussian and Iserian reception

In science, as in language, exemplars are requisite to conceptualisation: they act as signposts to and portals into areas of scientific discipline. Thomas Kuhn comments that science students around the world are exposed to very similar exemplars in order to aid in the explication of their discipline. For example, young students of physics will very probably be given problems based on the concept of inclined planes or conical pendula. The importance of this use of exemplars is that it enables the younger members of the scientific community to recognise group-determined resemblances:

> Acquiring an arsenal of exemplars, just as much as learning symbolic generalizations, is integral to the process by which a student gains access to the cognitive achievements of his disciplinary group.[10]

Another important observation arising from the use of exemplars in teaching is that their function depends upon the assumption of their universality for their efficacy. The philosopher Saul Kripke points out that the way students are taught mathematical functions such as addition depends upon this point. A child is given a finite number of examples of the function to complete, on the basis that if the student can successfully complete the examples given, he/she will be able to deal with any number of other cases of that function in the future. Naturally, from the collection of examples of addition problems, a student may be able to devise a rule that explains the examples and may aid in determining future actions when confronted with an addition problem.

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theory. Jauss' assertion that literature should be considered in terms of an historiography that reassesses the position of the text in current conditions, implies a view that textual meaning is both group-determined and altered over time. Iser takes up this point, proposing that meaning is the result of an interaction between text and reader. (Holub, R.C., *Reception Theory*, London 1989, pp.57-58, 83.) However, reception theory appears to hold to a philosophical foundation considerably different to the Wittgensteinian approach to language and meaning. According to the writer Robert Holub, both Jauss and Iser suffer from a conflict between their rejection of an objectivist standpoint in criticism and their treatment of language in a text. For example, Jauss finds himself in a circular objectivist trap where signals are meaningful within a certain perceptual framework, yet that framework exists "because we or the author of a poetics has claimed that certain features of works merit grouping them together." (p.61) Wittgenstein avoids being caught between group-determined meaning and the desire to ascribe a connection between language and an objective reality by positing that language, rather than being a descriptive tool that we choose to use in our picturing of reality, is in fact the sole constituent of that reality. If we are unable to operate outside language, then any discussion of the existence of an objective reality is mere speculation. This is what Wittgenstein referred to in his comment that "Language is not *contiguous* to anything else. We cannot speak of the use of language as opposed to anything else. So in philosophy all that is not gas is grammar." (Wittgenstein, L., *Wittgenstein's Lectures 1930-1932*, ed. D. Lee, Oxford, 1980, p.112. See also Pitkin, Hannah F., *Wittgenstein and Justice*, Berkeley, 1972, p.104)

[10] Kuhn, *ET*, pp.306-307.

Whether or not the student does this, however, the collection and the nascent rules acquire the status of a 'sign-post' that will guide the student's future actions. [11] It is our belief in the correctness of this sign-post that enables us not simply to confidently deal with indefinitely many instances of the action governed by the sign-post, but use our understanding of it as a point of departure in the discovery and understanding of other such sign-posts.

> When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.)[12]

In other words, recognition of the sign-post 'addition' enables a mathematics student to move on to the sign-post 'subtraction' from a stable knowledge base, and implies a sturdy understanding of the concept of numbers and their symbolic representation. Having identified the exemplar as the primary means through which a paradigm is transmitted through a community, whether of speech, science or theatre, Kuhn draws out the relationship between exemplars and other factors which he wishes to include as part of the compository criteria of a paradigm.

> I mean to suggest that some accepted examples of actual scientific practice - examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together - provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research.[13]

Kuhn here intimates a factor of the importance of exemplars in the articulation of a paradigm: that the exemplar is logically prior to the additional factors of law, theory, and so on, all of which may be derived by a process of rational thought from the exemplar itself. The process of derivation is the subject of sections 2.1.2 and 2.1.3.

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[11] Kripke, Saul A., *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Oxford, 1984, pp.7-8; Wittgenstein, *PI*, §143, §198.

[12] Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, Oxford, 1974, §141.

[13] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.10.

2.1.2 Application, Experimentation and Instrumentation

In the education of science students it is frequently the case that instruction in an exemplar will be accompanied by practical work that is intended to illustrate its use. It is important to note at this point the distinction to be made between practical work - that which is done by students - and experimental work. The 'experiments' that take place in school laboratories over the world bear none of the hallmarks of true experimental work, in that they have absolutely no intention of accomplishing original findings[14]; in practical work there is no suggestion of attempting to extend the paradigm.[15] The activities that take place in a student laboratory cover territory that has previously been evaluated, and are intended as an illustration and affirmation of the topic under review. Students complete what are generally standard practical tests with a known outcome, using prescribed laboratory equipment according to the conventions of their scientific community. For example, when chemistry students are taught about the molar concentrations of acids, they are expected to learn how to correctly manipulate titration equipment in order to accurately measure the concentration.[16] Similarly, students studying stage lighting learn how to light the stage (and the actors upon it) through the use of diagrams and practical work with lighting equipment.[17] In exercises such as this the science student learns the accepted methods of manipulating scientific apparatus in much the same way as the young child mentioned earlier learned the accepted

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[14] Kuhn notes that originality is a concept that should be used with care in connection with discussion of scientific research work. We are used to speaking of the desire in university departments, scientific or otherwise, for postgraduate students to engage themselves in 'original academic research', and a popular (mis)conception of the scientist sees him/her as being "a discoverer, an innovator, an adventurer into the domain of what is not yet known or not yet understood." (Medawar, P.B., *Induction and Intuition in Scientific Thought*, London, 1969, p.2) Kuhn stresses that all research topics are problems or puzzles that are derived from the paradigm, and that their solution should aid in the paradigm's articulation; problems outside the paradigm are regarded as 'metaphysical' or even as belonging to another discipline. (Kuhn, *SSR*, pp.25-29, 37) The scientist's challenge, when working on such a problem, "is the conviction that, if only he is skilful enough, he will succeed in solving a puzzle that no one before has solved or solved so well.""(p.38)

[15] Or better articulate an anomaly that could contribute to the paradigm's eventual downfall. Experimental work of this kind is discussed in Chapter 3.

[16] See Chalmers, *op.cit.*, p.91.

[17] e.g. Bunn, R., *Practical Stage Lighting*, Sydney, 1993, pp.31-33; Griffiths, T.R., ed., *Stagecraft*, Oxford, 1990, p.102.

ways of categorising birdlife. Just as Johnny's father provided his son with exemplars of birdlife and then observed and corrected his use of those exemplars, so in classrooms the science teacher will provide an exemplar of the way an experiment will be carried out, and will then observe and if necessary correct the students' attempts to emulate the example. [18] In both the chemistry and lighting examples above, a student's understanding of the use of the equipment in their practical work is demonstrated by two factors: their accurate emulation of the demonstration material provided by the teacher, and their achievement of results at the end of the practical work that lies within a spectrum of expected results. For example, if a student lighting a naturalistic stage production fails to adequately light the actors' faces, their teacher has no evidence to suggest that the student has adequately understood the function of stage lighting.[19]

Additionally, just as the categories the boy has learned will affect the way he thinks about other birdlife he encounters, and the mathematician's grasp of the concept of addition will affect the way she approaches other functions in mathematics, so the science student's understanding of the usage of apparatus in one situation will affect the way it is used in later contexts.

> In short, consciously or not, the decision to employ a particular piece of apparatus and to use it in a particular way carries an assumption that only certain sorts of circumstances will arise. There are instrumental as well as theoretical expectations, and they have often played a decisive role in scientific development.[20]

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[18] Kuhn, *ET*, pp.309, 313. Science teachers frequently use diagrams of apparatus in order to introduce students to a new experiment, just as parents frequently use pictures in books to introduce new concepts to their children. These function as exemplars, but in a different way to the examples given in the main body of the text, as it introduces an extra degree of sophistication; that is, in order for a science student to replicate with equipment what is depicted in diagrammatic form on a blackboard, the student must first have been taught how to read the diagram. Evidence presented through case-studies and experimental psychology suggests that our ability to interpret pictures is a learned activity. See Gregory, R.L., 'Recovery from Early Blindness: A Case Study' in *Concepts and Mechanisms of Perception*, London, 1974, pp.89, 96; Gregory, R.L., *Mirrors in Mind*, New York, 1997, p.15; Wittgenstein, *PI*, pp.194-195.

[19] Griffiths, *op.cit.*, p.103.

[20] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.59. Kuhn here seems to be pointing towards a congruence between the relation of scientific paradigm and equipment, and the Wittgensteinian approach to the relation of word and concept. We have previously noted Wittgenstein's assertion that "language is not *contiguous* to anything else" (Wittgenstein, *Lectures 1930-1932*, p.112); in other words, that a concept is inseparable from the language used to express it. "When I think in language, there aren't 'meanings' going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought." (Wittgenstein, *PI*, §329) Kuhn's

Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* in part dramatises the intimate relationship between paradigmatic research and instrumentation that existed in the development of chaos theory. Stoppard's character Valentine explains that the mathematics used in chaos theory is not of itself difficult, being comprised of x and *y* graphical equations. These are used to initiate feedback loops, in which a value worked out for *y* in one working out of the equation is substituted for *x* the next time the equation is used. The repetition of this action forms the loop, which can then be represented graphically or algorithmically. The crux of Stoppard's play is that mathematically this process is relatively simple, and could have been attempted by such a mathematician as the young Thomasina Coverly in the play. That feedback loops were not discovered at that point in time and the study of chaos theory begun is due to one practical reason, for as Valentine explains, the sheer number of calculations required to produce a graphical representation of the feedback loop, possibly reaching tens of thousands, would simply be too great for a person equipped with a pen and paper to contemplate.[21] The instrumentation of the time, pencil and paper, limited the number of calculations possible, in effect providing a practical limit to mathematical advance that fell well within a purely deterministic view of natural systems; any more complicated computations were unwritable, and therefore unthinkable. Conversely, if it had not been for the perspicacious intervention of mathematician Edward Lorenz in the 1960s, expectations that computer calculations of feedback loops were accurate and that the 'rounding up' of decimal places was an unimportant side-effect of their use, one of the most important principles of chaos theory – sensitive dependence on initial conditions – would not have been discovered.[22] The relationship between exemplars and instrumentation can therefore be seen to be to some extent reciprocal: lack of appropriate equipment may prevent the development of anomalous procedures or novel methods such as iterative algorithms and

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discussion of the discovery of oxygen (*SSR*, pp. 59-60) suggests that, just as concepts cannot be considered outside of language, so the way a scientist uses scientific apparatus or carries out an experiment is inseparable from the assumptions and expectations of the paradigm in which he labours.

[21] Stoppard, T., *Arcadia*, London, 1993, pp.44, 51.

[22] Gleick, J., *Chaos*, London, 1997, pp.13-14, 16-17, 23.

therefore support the dominant paradigm, while paradigm-supported assumptions about the use of equipment may help to prevent non-paradigmatic research from progressing. The example of the development of chaos theory here illustrates another important quality of paradigms: that they are self-supporting. Anomalous information must 'slip through the net' of paradigmatic expectations and practice if it is to be noticed and developed into a fledgling paradigm of its own. The process by which this occurs is discussed in Chapter 3.

2.1.3 Laws, Theories and Methodology

The relationship created between the exemplar and its defining effect upon the world view of the scientist using it, dramatised in Thomasina's abortive discovery of chaos theory in *Arcadia*, informs Kuhn's discussion of the place of laws, theory and methodology in the paradigm concept. As noted in the previous section, the difficulty encountered by Thomasina in her attempts to study iterated algorithms, the building blocks of chaos, lay in the fact that through limitations of instrumentation and the dominance of the Newtonian deterministic dynamics in the field of mathematics during her lifetime, the algorithms Thomasina wished to investigate lay outside of the prevailing world view.[23] In speaking of 'world views' we are referring to the set of metaphysical and methodological prescriptions that can be extracted from exemplars. For example, Newton's motion equations enable a mathematician, when given for example the distance travelled by a cannonball when fired and the time taken to travel that distance, to calculate other data about its flight such as its speed. Pierre Laplace took Newton's work a step further by concluding that, if every particle in the universe were ruled by the Newtonian laws of motion, then any event could theoretically be predicted, if only the data were available from the equations and exemplars

[23] Septimus' adherence to Newtonian dynamics initially prevents him from seeing the importance of Thomasina's work, describing it as "a fancy." Stoppard, *op.cit.*, p.37.

of Newton's work on motion were a number of predictions and conclusions, thus giving Newtonian physics a universal significance.[24]

Earlier in this chapter we noted that in Kuhn's conception of paradigms exemplars are considered as being logically prior to rules, laws and methodological prescriptions. Kuhn demonstrated this point with his description of the child Johnny learning to recognise waterfowl species. Johnny learned, through exemplars, how to recognise birdlife in the categories accepted by his speech community. From these exemplars Johnny and other community members are able to extract rules and laws; for example, Johnny may formulate the proposition 'all swans are white'. However, it is conceivable that another member of Johnny's community, having been to the zoo and seen a black swan, may wish to take issue with Johnny's statement. Such disagreements, Kuhn asserts, occur over the formulation of many rules and laws because members of a community, though sharing a common body of belief, express that belief differently. That is to say, they will have formed their categorisations of such objects as aquatic birdlife through the different examples they experience through life.[25] This process of collection is, however, only a part of the process of concept formation. The psychologist Lev Vygotsky argues that abstraction is a vital element in the formation process, [26] and his description of concept formation as an alternation from the general to the particular and vice versa, is echoed by Wittgenstein in his discussion of games.

> Consider for example the proceedings that we call "games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? ... For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.[27]

By comparing different activities commonly described as games, Wittgenstein demonstrates that any definition of 'game' would invariably exclude activities one wished to describe as a game, while including many activities one would

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[24] Davies, P. and Gribbin, J., *The Matter Myth*, Harmondsworth, 1992, pp. 25-26.

[25] Kuhn, *ET*, pp.311, 315, 317-8.

[26] Vygotsky, L., *Thought and Language*, Massachusetts, 1962, p.81.

[27] Wittgenstein, *PI*, §66.

not wish to see so described.[28] Overall, in our examination of the notion of a 'game', we would be left with a conglomeration of similarities and correspondences forming a matrix of understanding, which we are then able to utilise in communication with others, who in turn are utilising their own matrices. In a similar way, any attempt to understand Newton's equations of motion purely from laws and rules (i.e. no reference to the actual equations themselves) would result in a matrix which, while useful in an historical or philosophical study, would be of little value in teaching physics students how to use the equations.[29]

Although a paradigm's exemplars are prior to its matrix of laws, rules and methodological prescriptions, certain statements and beliefs that are contained within the matrix may be seen to be powerful determinants of what is considered a suitable topic for research within a paradigm. The cold fusion experiments of the late 1980s, for example, were discredited by the wider scientific community largely as a result of their incompatibility with the generally accepted view in nuclear physics that fusion can only occur at extremely high temperatures.[30] Kuhn remarks on the expectations of scientists upon the results of experiments:

> the range of anticipated, and thus of assimilable, results is always small compared with the range that imagination can conceive. And the project whose outcome does not fall in that narrower range is usually just a research failure, one which reflects not on nature but on the scientist.[31]

It is this fate that we realise befalls Septimus as we view the closing minutes of *Arcadia*. The hermit that the character Hannah is studying throughout the play, which we come to realise is Thomasina's tutor, is described by Hannah's historical sources as being "a sage of lunacy"; he earns this title not merely for his presumed grief over Thomasina's death, but for his obsessive

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[28] Chalmers, *op.cit.*, p.93.

[29] Kuhn, *SSR*, pp.46-47.

[30] Another fundamental error made by the scientists at the centre of the cold fusion experiments was their eagerness to release their data to the world press. It is likely that the general scientific community did not take kindly to their (possibly inadvertent) attempt to circumvent one of the fundamental principles of scientific research: evaluation by peers. See Herman, R., *Fusion: the Search for Endless Energy*, Cambridge, 1991, pp.228-234.

[31] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.35.

efforts to continue her mathematical work. By persisting with research into thermodynamics and chaos theory that did not fall within the limits of the Newtonian paradigm, in the eyes of other Septimus loses all vestiges of academic authority, his work dismissed as the musings of a madman.

> When he died, the cottage was stacked solid with paper ... Peacock says he was suspected of genius. It turned out, of course, he was off his head. He'd covered every sheet with cabalistic proofs that the world was coming to an end.[32]

2.2 Paradigms in British West End Theatre

In Section 2.1 the scientific paradigm was defined as a matrix of exemplars, applications instrumentation, laws and theories that provided a means of perceiving, categorising and evaluating natural phenomena. The paradigm is the entity that governs the composition of elements that make up that hypothesis, that is, the exemplars, laws, methodologies etc., and these elements may in turn be the means by which a paradigm is recognised and understood. Theatrical productions, like scientific theories, present a representation or hypothesis of reality; in the words of Aristotle, an "imitation of an action."[33] Theatrical paradigms, like those in science, may be recognised by their exemplars, applications, and so on, which fall into the categories of Figure 2.2. The categories on the right hand side of Figure 2.2 are a demonstration of the way in which theatre may be divided into Kuhnian categories, and are placed alongside their scientific counterparts. The production as viewed by an audience is posited as the theatrical equivalent of the scientific exemplar; the constituent elements of the playscript – the written artefact taken into rehearsals by director and cast – as equivalents of scientific laws and methodology; and the mechanics of theatre production, the process of turning a playscript into a performance text, comprising design, acting, directing and management, as equivalents of applications and instrumentation. All of these categories and sub-categories

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[32] Stoppard, *op.cit.*, p.27. Also pp.65, 78, 83-4.

[33] Aristotle, *Poetics* in Butcher, J., ed., *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th ed., New York, 1951, VI.2

Science	**Theatre**
Exemplar	Production (play in performance)
Application/Instrumentation/ Experimentation	Mechanics of Theatre Production: • Theatre management • Rehearsal practices • Performance conditions • Acting, direction • Set, costume, lighting design
Methodology/Laws/Theories	Constituents of Playscripts: • Subject matter • Plot structure • Characterisation • Language use

Figure 2.2 Kuhnian paradigm elements and their theatrical equivalents.

are governed by conventions, and are the primary areas in which theatrical practitioners may actively affect the representation of reality to be seen by the audience. Theatrical conventions are an (implicit) agreement between the theatrical practitioner and audience that the constituents of the theatrical presentation before them are legitimate representations of reality. Conventions may be seen at work in the writing and presentation of naturalistic dialogue.

> Even where the dramatist succeeds in creating a perfect illusion of *ex tempore* conversation, he is still engaged in the arrangement of words into a particular, and conventional, literary form ... [it is] a fact equally requiring that consent which is convention, that the people moving on the stage in front of an audience should talk intimately and personally *as if they were not being overheard.*[34]

Though conventions may be invented and "taught" to the audience in the course of a given performance, as when a line on the floor of a set is accepted as a wall if the actors treat it as an inviolable barrier, the conventions most applicable to this discussion are those which are shared by tradition, as with the example of naturalistic dialogue already quoted.[35] Conventions are a means by which a paradigm may be quantified, as Raymond Williams notes:

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[34] Williams, R., *Drama From Ibsen to Brecht*, London, 1961, p.21.

[35] Gross, R., *Understanding Playscripts*, Bowling Green, 1974, p.193.

> Any drama must be judged in the context of its own conventions...[36]

Just as a scientific exemplar may both exhibit its paradigmatic applications, laws and methodologies, *and* be shaped by them, so too may a theatrical production be said to both exhibit the working of the conventions of working practices and playwriting techniques, and be shaped by them. The following sections examine the various conventions that are indicative of one particular theatrical paradigm, and the following chapters detail the ways in which these conventions are questioned and even altered when the predominant paradigm is placed under stress, and theatre practitioners begin the search for a new means of representing reality.

Section 2.2 is devoted to a discussion of a theatrical paradigm from this century: British West End theatre between the end of the First World War and the first performance of *Look Back in Anger* in 1956.[37] Critically overshadowed by the New Wave movement originating in the Royal Court and Theatre Workshop, the West End is generally considered as the main site for the provision of escapist entertainment, particularly of the post-WW2 era, though the form was undoubtedly in existence prior to 1939:

> a theatre of colour and movement, of fine fabrics, of shadows, of eccentric, cascading words, of leaps of thought ... of lightness and of all forms of mystery and surprise – it was the theatre of a battered Europe that seemed to share one aim – a reaching back towards a memory of lost grace.[38]

Though Peter Brook here speaks almost nostalgically, the West End theatre is frequently derided for precisely those same qualities of production, and plays exhibiting finely-honed dialogue and neatly structured plots are

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[36] Williams, *op.cit.*, p.48.

[37] These dates are intended only as a guide to the extent of the paradigm I wish to illustrate, and to indicate its primary period of influence. West End theatre of the type I am about to describe can be seen to continue in the form and content of later playscripts; for example, though Peter Shaffer's first play *Five Finger Exercise* was first produced in 1958, it neatly approximates the 'West End' paradigm. Shaffer, P., *Five Finger Exercise*, London, 1960.

For those interested in pursuing the paradigm concept further in Kuhn's writing, the period of transition between the Ptolemaic and Copernican astronomic systems is one of Kuhn's most discussed examples. See also Kuhn, T.S., *The Copernican Revolution*, 9th printing, Cambridge, Mass., 1977; Dijksterhuis, E.J., *The Mechanization of the World Picture*, Oxford, 1961.

[38] Brook, P., *The Empty Space*, London, 1990, p.48.

dismissed as not being socially or politically relevant.[39] The following sections examine these qualities in terms of their importance as defining characteristics of the West End paradigm, using the original 1952 productions of Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* and Terence Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* as the exemplars through which these elements may be described. Section 2.2.1 examines the theoretical/methodological elements of the West End paradigm that may be discerned in these plays' plots, characters, language use and subject matter, while Section 2.2.2 discusses the mechanics of theatre production in regard to the stagings of both plays. The early repertory acting career of Harold Pinter is used as a means of illustrating many points about the management and production techniques of the West End paradigm, partly because Pinter's experiences under the stage name David Baron have been well documented by David Thompson, but also because the discussion of Pinter's acting experience under the West End paradigm provides background detail for the argument of Chapter 3, in which Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is in part examined in terms of its visible influences from the West End paradigm.[40]

2.2.1 Playscript Methodology in the West End Paradigm

In March and November 1952 respectively, *The Deep Blue Sea* and *The Mousetrap* made their West End debuts. Both plays were astoundingly popular with audiences: *The Mousetra*p's world record-breaking run continues unbroken, while the original production of *The Deep Blue Sea* ran for over a year, and also attracted considerable critical approval.[41] Though these plays may be viewed as being contrasting in style and aesthetic value, this section will demonstrate that both works may be used as exemplars of the basic playwriting characteristics of the West End paradigm, and in some areas may be seen to have characteristics in common. Chosen for their ability to represent work at either end of the pull inherent in West End realism

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[39] Hinchcliffe, A., *British Theatre 1950-70*, Oxford, 1974, p.22.

[40] Thompson, D.T., *Pinter: the Player's Playwright*, Basingstoke, 1985.

[41] Duff, C., *op.cit.*, p.132.

from its birth in the plays of Robertson in the 1860s between Scribean and Zola-esque conceptions of play structure, *The Deep Blue Sea* is representative of those works which rely primarily upon the portrayal of ideas through the medium of character, while *The Mousetrap* is representative of those works which place a greater degree of dependency upon the efficacy of the plot for their interest to the audience. Both plays evince the characteristic of what Williams describes as 'technical naturalism' – a preference for a 'lifelike' reproduction of setting and character which Ruby Cohn, using her preferred term 'realism', describes:

> Stage realism may be recognized as a code of conventions – picture-frame proscenium bounding a room furnished with three-dimensional objects and peopled with characters who behave predictably ... and who speak in clear sentences and concepts.[42]

However, *The Deep Blue Sea* comes rather closer to that more rigorous naturalism described by Williams as being a fusion of stage verisimilitude and naturalist philosophy, though like much English naturalism it is still to a degree wedded to the plot imperatives of the well-made play.[43] This section examines more fully the complexities of the relationships between these two types of paradigmatic playwriting under the characteristics of subject matter, plot structure, characterisation and language use.

Subject Matter

Subject matter is a complex topic in the West End paradigm, fuelled as it is by contradictory impulses; the desire to tackle 'difficult' social, moral and sexual issues visibly struggles against overt and self-imposed censorship and an overriding need to please and entertain the general public, a struggle that is particularly noticeable in the works of Terence Rattigan. There can be little doubt that the subject matter tackled by playwrights of the West End paradigm was substantially influenced by the controlling powers of the Office

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[42] Cohn, R., *Retreats from Realism in Recent English Drama*, Cambridge, 1991, p.3. Cohn prefers to use the term 'realism', attributing additional conventions to the term 'naturalism' as follows: lower class status of protagonists; increased focus on the inexorable workings of fate on the protagonists. Also Williams, R., 'Social Environment and Theatrical Environment: the Case of English Naturalism' in Axton, M. & Williams, R., eds., *English Drama: Forms and Development*, Cambridge, 1977, pp.201, 206-208.

[43] Taylor, J.R., *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play*, London, 1967, pp.153, 160.

of the Lord Chamberlain. According to John Johnston, former Assistant Comptroller to the Lord Chamberlain, between 1921 and 1968 only 331 of a total 41,767 plays submitted for licensing were banned thus suggesting a minimal impact upon theatrical life. However, the author does not give figures for the numbers of those plays licensed in those years that had had alterations imposed as a condition of the licence.[44]. Anecdotal evidence provided by Johnston and Richard Findlater suggests that changes to lines, phrases, stage directions and scenes, in whatever degree of severity, were a commonplace. Such strictures naturally made the Lord Chamberlain an unpopular figure amongst playwrights, who believed that the licensing and censorship process placed a limit upon their creativity. At worst this system resulted in an insidious form of self-censorship, as Arnold Bennett testified to a 1909 Joint Select Committee investigating the Lord Chamberlain's powers:

> It is not a question of subject, it is a question of treatment. Immediately you get *near* the things that really matter in a play, you begin to think about the censor, and it is all over with your play.[45]

That *The Deep Blue Sea* exists in its present form is in part a result of self-censorship indirectly attributable to the Lord Chamberlain's ban upon representation of homosexuality onstage. The inspiration for the play was the suicide of Kenneth Morgan, with whom it seems likely Rattigan had had an affair. Though it was rumoured that Rattigan had originally submitted to Beaumont a draft of the play containing explicit homosexual references, this seems highly unlikely, as Rattigan would have known that it would not be passed for performance. Instead, Rattigan's grief and emotion over the suicide was placed into a heterosexual context, and the emphasis of the storyline placed "not so much on the specific nature of the sexual relationship

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[44] Johnston, J., *The Lord Chamberlain's Blue Pencil*, London, 1990, p.278. To some extent this control was subverted by Theatre Clubs, small venues which avoided the control of the Licensing Act by turning their premises into private clubs and performing plays that either had been refused a licence (e.g. Osborne's *A Patriot for Me*), or those that were not submitted to the Lord Chamberlain as they were certain to be refused (e.g. Hellman's *The Children's Hour*). See Marshall, N., *The Other Theatre*, London, 1947; Johnston, *op.cit.*, pp.205-209; Hellman, L., *The Children's Hour* in J.C. Trewin, ed., *Plays of the Year, Volume 5*, London, 1952.

[45] Arnold Bennett quoted in Findlater, R., *Banned! A Review of Theatrical Censorship in Britain*, London, 1967, pp.106; 179.

as it was the deeply emotional implications of that relationship."[46] Similarly, the effectiveness of the climax of the first act of *The Mousetrap*, in which a character is killed in blackout, may be seen as resulting from strictures placed upon the portrayal of violence onstage.

Soon after the production of the *Deep Blue Sea*, Rattigan wrote a preface to the 2nd volume of his *Collected Plays*, in which he discussed his playwriting technique, and attributed his success to his understanding of his audience. To illustrate this, he invented a character called Aunt Edna, who was to function as his archetypal middle class, middle-aged theatre-goer. [47] Reputedly bearing a striking resemblance to Rattigan's mother Vera, Aunt Edna would volubly express her disapproval of any play which failed to meet her standards of suitable and respectable entertainment. Rattigan's invention of Aunt Edna is instructive on two levels. Firstly, it indicates the extent to which Rattigan's desire to disguise his plays as heterosexual drama stems from deeply personal motives; Rattigan was very careful to keep any intimation of his homosexuality from his parents, particularly his mother.[48] More importantly, Aunt Edna's creation also highlights a contradiction that lies at the heart of Rattigan's work. Especially later in his career, Rattigan was dismissed as a crowd-pleaser, whose plays politely described the lives of the middle class in crisis in such a way as to appeal to the lowest-common-denominator, with Aunt Edna usually taken as a confirmation of Rattigan's populist tendencies. Demonstrably, however, Rattigan's work can be viewed as progressive, even daring, in terms of his depiction of moral and sexual issues.[49] For example, in *The Deep Blue Sea* Hester leaves her sexless marriage to William Collyer for Freddie Page, an impoverished test pilot. Her

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[46] Rusinko, S., *Terence Rattigan*, Boston, 1983, p.83. Darlow, M. & Hodson, G., *Terence Rattigan: The Man and His Work*, London, 1979, p.218; Duff, *op.cit.*, p.128. See Young, B.A., *The Rattigan Version*, London, 1986, p.102 for the opposing view. Wansell, G., *Terence Rattigan: A Biography*, London, 1995, p.218f quotes Rattigan as saying that after the ban on homosexual representation was lifted, he had contemplated rewriting the play, but eventually decided against it.

[47] Rattigan, T., 'Preface' in *The Collected Plays of Terence Rattigan, Vol. 2*, London, 1953, pp.xi-xii.

[48] *ibid.*, pp.xii-xiii; Wansell, *op.cit.*, pp.150-151, p.70; Darlow & Hodson, *op.cit.*, pp.221-222.

[49] Innes, C., *Modern British Drama 1890-1990*, Cambridge, 1996, pp.90, 93. Aunt Edna can also be seen as another of Rattigan's affirmations of his disapprobation of the Shavian Play of Ideas; see Rusinko, S., *op.cit.*, p.23.

attraction to him began and is based in physicality, and inspires an obsession so powerful that she is prepared to accept the lack of real affection between them. Freddie recognises that he can't fulfil Hester's inflated expectations for him: "I can't be a ruddy Romeo all the time ... moderation in all things – that's always been my motto."[50] It is Hester's recognition of their fundamental incompatibility that drives the play: having fled from financial dependence on William Collyer and faced with the end of her emotional and sexual dependence on Freddie, Hester must decide whether she is capable of an independent existence.[51] At the end of the play she goes to the gas fire, but to light it rather than attempt suicide once more. Though criticised by Kenneth Tynan, this ending is crucial to the completion of Rattigan's subversive subject matter. For Hester to commit suicide at the end of the play would be to place societal pressures of morality victorious over Hester's abortive attempt at life outside conventional moral boundaries. Instead, the audience are invited to approve of Hester's decision to live, thus implicitly also approving of her decision to live in spite of convention.

> This is the message of many of Rattigan's mature plays: human beings cannot live unless they come to terms with themselves and their circumstances, no matter how painful that truth may be.[52]

Of course, one's view of Rattigan and his plays is heavily coloured by the interpretation that is drawn from the works themselves. For example, it is equally possible to posit an interpretation of *The Deep Blue Sea* that presents it as a vindication of traditional male upper-class British values, in which Hester – an anti-feminist portrait of destructive sexuality – is the architect of Freddie's downfall, being the cause of the alcoholism that has ruined his test-pilot career. Similarly, Collyer in such an interpretation would be the embodiment of the positive values of upper-class maleness, being both rational and faithful in spite of Hester's flagrant infidelity (though one must wonder how rational it would be for him to take Hester back and risk social

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[50] Rattigan, T., *The Deep Blue Sea* in *The Collected Plays of Terence Rattigan, Volume 2*, p.323; p.313f. (Hereafter referred to as *DBS*)

[51] *ibid.*, pp.313, 336, 361. Duff, *op.cit.*, pp.128-129; Darlow & Hodson, *op.cit.*, p.199; see also Rusinko, *op.cit.*, p.81.

[52] Darlow & Hodson, *op.cit.*, p.160. Rattigan, *DBS*, pp.363-364. See Innes, *op.cit.*, pp.91-2, 97 for discussion of subversive depiction of societal morality in *Separate Tables*.

ostracism). The fact that the play can yield such widely varying interpretations results from a tension inherent in West End serious drama between a playwright's desire to use their play as a means of examining social/moral issues, yet not jeopardise the personal and commercial imperative of keeping an audience sufficiently interested in a play to ensure consistently large houses. Unlike the 'New Wave' playwrights and critics of the late 1950s, Rattigan and his colleagues did not wish to shock or provoke their audience. Rather, they had to tread a fine line between writing cosy dramas affirming the status quo and crafting works that would deepen an audience's understanding of an issue without directly challenging their beliefs and opinions and potentially losing box office takings.

> The first function of a play is to entertain an audience. That is a platitude which the *avant garde* too often ignore ... The dramatist may write to bring men nearer to God, to Moscow or to themselves; his ultimate concern may be a change of heart or a change of society; but he is wasting his time, and mistaking his vocation, if he does not acknowledge that his immediate duty is to the expectations of the strangers who have come to his play ... in the theatre, if you don't have an audience, you don't exist.[53]

The difficulty a playwright could have in keeping his play and its production from crossing the line into 'cosiness' is demonstrated by Wynyard Browne's *The Holly and the Ivy*, whose final scene involves a Norfolk vicar and his wayward daughter coming to the realisation that they can be reconciled while still disagreeing about life choices. Browne sat in on a performance by a repertory company in Oxford, in which the interpretation of the ending was substantially altered, instead suggesting that the estranged daughter had repented of her waywardness and converted to Christianity. In a question-and-answer session after the performance Browne attempted to undo the damage of the misinterpretation by telling the audience what he had intended the scene to convey. The audience made it clear to Browne that they preferred the sentimentalised interpretation that they had seen.[54] This rigidity of audience expectation as discovered by Browne amply demonstrates the necessity for the apparent uneasiness in the West End drama to be more overt in its presentation of subject matter. Findlater observed:

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[53] Findlater, *The Unholy Trade*, London, 1952, p.193; see also Duff, *op.cit.*, p.89.

> One of the curious facts about the theatre is that it keeps in circulation a whole set of situations and responses long after they have disappeared from the world outside. They mould the expectations of the audience, and what the audience expects it usually gets.[55]

The subject matter of *The Deep Blue Sea* is indicative of a primary topic of concern among West End paradigm playwrights: the quest for identity, and the dilemma of whether personal morality is more important than the good of society.[56] John Whiting's *Marching Song* is another play of the paradigm that clearly demonstrates this pre-occupation. General Rupert Forster has been imprisoned for cowardice after pausing in his attack on a town on the Eastern Front. This pause, he later reveals, was caused by the effect upon him of a massacre of 400 children that he initiated. Having previously avoided emotional ties in order to cultivate the depersonalisation he had considered essential to successful soldiering, after the massacre Forster is forced to contemplate his inextricable connection to a wider humanity revealed by the children's' deaths. Now facing a show trial, Forster is faced with a choice: either he must commit suicide and thus ensure his country's return to peace, or exert his free will to live but consign his nation to a damaging bout of recriminations. His decision to die, which in a lesser play would be prompted by his willingness to sacrifice himself for society, is instead motivated by his realisation that his newly-prized humanity and the new life it offers may be just as dystopian as his soldierly existence. This is revealed through Forster's discovery that the goatherd's songs he had heard while imprisoned and had idealised as life-affirming prayer, were in fact obscenities.[57] Though his nation may benefit from Forster's death, his choice to die was made purely for reasons of personal morality.[58]

Though used on a lesser scale than in *Marching Song* or *The Deep Blue Sea*, *The Mousetrap* also includes dilemmas of personal identity as part of its dramatic material. Part of the essential equipment of the detective story is

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[54] Duff, *op.cit.*, pp.77-78.

[55] Findlater, *op.cit.*, p.197.

[56] Gascoigne, B., *Twentieth-Century Drama*, London, 1962, pp.37, 48.

[57] Whiting, J., *Marching Song*, London, 1954, pp. 43-44, 55.

[58] *ibid.*, pp.22-23, 38-39, 56, 62. See also Duff, *op.cit.*, pp.174-175.

the provision of 'red herrings', false suspects whose position in the play is to disguise from the audience the identity of the real murderer. The characters functioning as red herrings usually misinform the audience of their true physical or emotional identities, and the detective must unmask these characters in order to solve the crime.[59] In *The Mousetrap*, for example, Christopher Wren's story about his name and his profession as an architect seem implausible in the light of his rather childish behaviour; Major Metcalf at first seems to be a thoroughly ordinary person, but his startled reaction to the news that the police have contacted the Manor signals to the audience that he also is not the person he seems.[60] By the end of the play we realise that every character except Giles has been involved in some kind of masking of their true selves: Christopher Wren is an army deserter, Paravicini a smuggler, Major Metcalf a police officer, and so on. Masked characters may hide their identity out of a personal problem that has nothing to do with the crime being investigated, as with Christopher Wren, or may be protecting themselves from harm, as with Mollie and Miss Casewell.

The Mousetrap is an example of a West End paradigm play that, unlike *Marching Song* or *The Deep Blue Sea*, has no subjectival inner tension between reinforcing and subverting societal values, being unabashedly conservative in its affirmation of traditional English values, perhaps the most prominent being a belief in justice. Perhaps as a reaction to the overwhelming and apparently uncontrollable loss of life in World War 1, detective stories, with their emphasis upon the inevitable victory of justice over evil, became extremely popular.[61] The reader or audience member of a 'Golden Age' detective novel or play was guaranteed that the perpetrator of the crime depicted would be found by the end of the story, and would be promised just punishment for his/her crimes. [62] This guarantee of justice

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[59] Shaw, M. & Vanacker, S., *Reflecting on Miss Marple*, London, 1991, p.21.

[60] Christie, A., *The Mousetrap and Selected Plays*, London, 1994, pp.298, 312-313.

[61] Watson, C., 'The Message of Mayhem Parva' in Keating, H.R.F., ed., *Agatha Christie: First Lady of Crime*, London, 1977, p.108.

[62] See Sayers, D.L. & Paton Walsh, J., *Thrones, Dominations*, London, 1998, p.173:

> Detective stories contain a dream of justice. They project a vision of a world in which wrongs are righted ... A world in which murderers are caught and hanged, and innocent victims are avenged...

served to affirm societal mores, as the punishment of the crime implied the affirmation of the laws governing the crime. The storyline of *The Mousetrap* highlights the promise of justice for the perpetrator of the murder of Mrs Boyle and Mrs Lyon by emphasising the degree of danger in which the play's more sympathetic characters are placed by the murderer. The main characters, Giles and Mollie Ralston, are a reassuringly ordinary young couple opening a guest house in a Manor House that has seen better days. The Ralstons' good-humoured banter in the opening minutes of the play sets the scene for the invasion of evil that is to take place later in the play.

> Giles: I can't help thinking we ought to have taken a correspondence course in hotel keeping. We're sure to get had in some way...Some of these people may be criminals hiding from the police. [63]

Not only do the Ralstons not know any of their guests, but they are forced to remain in the house with them when the house is snowed in. Sergeant Trotter's insistence that one or more of the group is hiding important information heightens the audience's anxiety, which reaches a climax when Trotter suggests to Mollie that even her husband may not be all that he seems. Christie adds narrative interest to her tale of the triumph of good over evil through the complication of Trotter's character. Forced into madness after an abusive childhood, with Trotter Christie suggests that though as a murderer he must be punished for his crimes, the fact that he was initially a victim himself makes him a figure for audience pity as well as fear.[64]

Plot

It is in the areas of plot structure and characterisation that the inner tension inherent in English naturalism between well-made structure and the portrayal of character in relation to their environment is most strongly recognised. With particular regard to plot structure, critic John Elsom has described dramatic works composed after World War 2 as being characterised by a set of "rigid and limiting" criteria governing stage

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[63] Christie, *op.cit.*, pp.290-291.

[64] *ibid.*, pp.308f., 319, 338, 364, 316-318.

technique, which could "be traced back to a compromise between 'naturalism' and the 'well-made play'."[65] In general, plays of the West End paradigm inhabit a position on a spectrum between these two poles, according to how strongly they favour the criteria of one form or the other, creating works that are either predominantly plot-based or character-based. One of the more recognisably 'naturalistic' of playwrights in this regard was Terence Rattigan, though it is important to note that Rattigan, like other playwrights of the West End paradigm, are by no means strict adherents to the main precepts of the naturalist movement.[66] As noted earlier, Williams, defined naturalism as a specific fusion of verisimilitude in representation with "a philosophical position allied to science, natural history and materialism."[67] English naturalism is notable for its rather weaker stance on the philosophical basis of the form. For example, Rattigan betrays no interest in a Zola-esque conception of plays as clinical laboratories where individuals' behaviour could be observed and evaluated by the playwright and audience; indeed, his frequent insistence that theatre's foremost function is as entertainment seems a diametrically opposing viewpoint. Hester Collyer is not cast in the mould of such naturalistic heroines as Miss Julie, and Rattigan makes no obvious attempt to portray Hester's drama as being the product of heredity: *The Deep Blue Sea* is not a 'case history'.[68] English naturalism shrank away from the more radical elements of the movement, eschewing dramatic experimentation for the conservatism of familial or domestic drama, but retaining the naturalistic bias towards the elucidation of character influenced and mediated by their environment as the impetus for the action.[69] Rattigan's preference for plays of character was revealed in an article he wrote for the *Theatre News* and *New Statesman* in 1950.

> From Aeschylus to Tennessee Williams the only theatre that has ever mattered is the theatre of character and narrative ... I don't

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[65] Elsom, J., *Post-War British Theatre*, rev. ed., London, 1979, p.35.

[66] For a neat summary of the linguistic slipperiness of the terms 'naturalism' and 'realism' see Innes, C., 'Introduction' in *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre*, London, 2000, p.5.

[67] Williams, *op.cit.*, p.203.

[68] Furst, L.R. & Skrine, P.N., *Naturalism*, London, 1971, pp.18, 30. See also Rattigan, T., 'Preface' in *The Collected Plays of Terence Rattigan, Volume 3*, London, 1964, p.xvii, p.xxvii.

[69] Williams, *op.cit.*, p.217.

> think that ideas, *per se*, social, political, or moral, have a very important place in the theatre. They definitely take third place to character and narrative...[70]

Rattigan's statement closely mirrors similar principles articulated by Zola:

> I tried to make of it a purely human study ... the action did not consist in any story invented for the occasion, but in the inner struggles of the characters.[71]

The care with which Rattigan structures his plays around a character's inner turmoil is ably demonstrated by *The Deep Blue Sea*. All the main structural points of its plot, including the end-of-act curtain incidents, are motivated by the relationship between Hester and Freddie: this may be described, in Stanislavskian terminology, as the play's *super-objective*. For example, Hester's suicide attempt, which is motivated by her relationship, opens the play. Freddie's discovery of Hester's suicide letter provides the link from Act 1 into Act 2, and his admission that he will travel to his new job in South America on his own towards the end of Act 2 is the incident that propels the play towards its conclusion, as Hester is then compelled to decide whether or not she is capable of living without him.[72] Rattigan also utilises to a limited extent the naturalist preoccupation with the examination of character in relation to their environment. Hester's emotional crisis may in large part be explained as originating both from her past experiences and circumstances as well as from her present home situation. Rattigan highlights the danger of Hester's intense sexual feelings towards Freddie by giving her a conservative background: Hester is a parson's daughter, rather plain in appearance, who "married the first man who asked her" presumably from the belief that a lack of sexual attraction to one's partner was either normal or far safer than the alternative. The division between Hester's upbringing and her current situation living 'in sin' with Page is brought to a climax by Rattigan by placing her in a shabby flat in Ladbroke Grove. Not only is Hester forced to

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[70] Rattigan quoted in Darlow & Hodson, *op.cit.*, p.182.

[71] Zola, E., *Preface to Thérèse Raquin* in Clark, B.A., ed., *European Theories of the Drama*, rev. ed., New York, 1938, p.401. See also Zola, E., *Naturalism in the Theatre* in Bentley, E., ed., *The Theory of the Modern Stage*, rev. ed., London, 1992, p.356; Styan, J.L., *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice Volume 1: Realism and Naturalism*, Cambridge, 1981, p.6. With regard to English naturalism, see Worth, *op.cit.*, p.4; Hinchcliffe, *op.cit.*, pp.26, 72.

[72] Rattigan, *DBS*, pp.293, 320, 342-344.

live in lodgings far inferior to anything she has presumably experienced before, but even the security of this residence is placed in doubt by Page's inability to find work: a month's rent is owed on the flat. Rattigan's placing of his characters in a specific set of physical circumstances thus adds motivation and impetus to his main character's emotional dilemmas.

By contrast to the character-led plays of Terence Rattigan, many plays seen on the post-war English stage, particularly comedies and mysteries, depended more on the detailed construction of plot events rather than depth of characterisation for their dramatic effectiveness, their naturalist tendencies being confined to the physical representation of the setting and the characters' dialogue patterns. Such works tend closer to the ideals of the 'well-made' play, whose originator was the French playwright Eugène Scribe. To Scribe a play's Unity of Action was all-important; viewing a play as being a series of planned events, Scribe considered the positioning and prompt dispatch of plot items paramount. Characterisation and dialogue were considered secondary, only significant insofar as they were capable of forwarding the plot, a structural characteristic particularly evident in *The Mousetrap*.[73] J.C. Trewin remarks that in Christie's plays character is always secondary in importance to action.

> Too often, in early plays or late, her people were stereotyped ... they could have been transferred, as needed, from plot to plot, hall to manor, court to vicarage...[74]

As with their subject matter, the sometimes exaggerated emphasis on plot in detective plays and stories is attributable to their initial burst of popularity after World War 1.[75] Edmund Wilson described the popularity of the detective novel as being a product of its effectiveness as escapist literature: "You cannot *read* such a book, you run through it to see the problem worked

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[73] Witt, D.E., *Eugène Scribe and Nineteenth-Century Theater: From Vaudeville to Grand Opera*, PhD George Washington University 1986, Ann Arbor, 1989, pp.4, 89, 137.

[74] Trewin, 'A Midas Gift to the Theatre' in Keating, *op.cit.*, p.140.

[75] See Watson in Keating, *op.cit.*, p.108: "The immeasurable carnage of the recent war was a curiously private obscenity ... And out of the silence... there was formed a vacuum in which .. [g]ames were the thing to cheer everybody up."

out..."[76] Detective stories, like crossword puzzles and other games, required little or no emotional investment on the part of the reader:

> I read detective stories, too. They were about the only thing I could read. All the others had the War in them ... or some damn' thing I didn't want to think about.[77]

Detective stories such as *The Mousetrap*, therefore, rely upon the twists and turns of their plots for audience interest and engagement, a state of affairs directly comparable to Scribean technique. This is most easily discernible when the plot is represented in diagrammatic form, as is the plot of *The Mousetrap* in Figures 2.3a and 2.3b. Christie takes advantage of the questionable identities of the guests at Monkswell Manor in order to set up a state of uncertainty before Trotter's arrival. After his entrance, plot events begin to congregate around his time-line, indicating that Trotter is the primary initiator of the play's action. Like the well-made play, *The Mousetrap* reaches its conclusion when the fraudulent character, Trotter, is unmasked, restoring heroine Mollie Ralston to safety.[78] Also reminiscent of the well-made play is the way in which the plot of *The Mousetrap* is rooted in events which took place long before the curtain went up, and is forwarded by a series of coincidences which border on the unbelievable. Not only was Mollie Ralston's whereabouts uncovered by Trotter, who had been only a boy when the Longridge Farm incident took place, but most of the Ralstons' guests are also in some way connected to the incident.[79]

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[76] Wilson, E., 'Why Do People Read Detective Stories? in *Classics and Commercials*, New York, 1958, p.234. See also Grella, G., 'Murder and Manners: the Formal Detective Novel', *Novel*, vol. 4 (Fall 1970), p.30.

[77] Sayers, D.L., *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, London 1985, p.201.

[78] Stanton, S., 'Introduction' in *Camille and Other Plays*, New York, 1957, p.xii.

Arnold Ridley's *Easy Money*, first produced in 1947, is another example of a work which sacrifices characterisation for sophistication of plot construction. (Ridley, A., *Easy Money*, rev. ed., London, 1955) Though all the main characters are given specific generally money-related dilemmas to work through during the course of the play, these are written merely as plot complications and comedic episodes, and no one character's difficulties are intended to be the audience's main focus of attention. This is indicated by the sheer number of characters with concerns to be resolved, particularly when compared with a comedy as sparing in construction as Noel Coward's *Private Lives*, in which the entire plot is driven by the inability of Amanda and Elyot to live either together or apart (Coward, N., *Private Lives* in *Collected Plays: Two*, rev. ed., London, 1999).

[79] See Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.13.

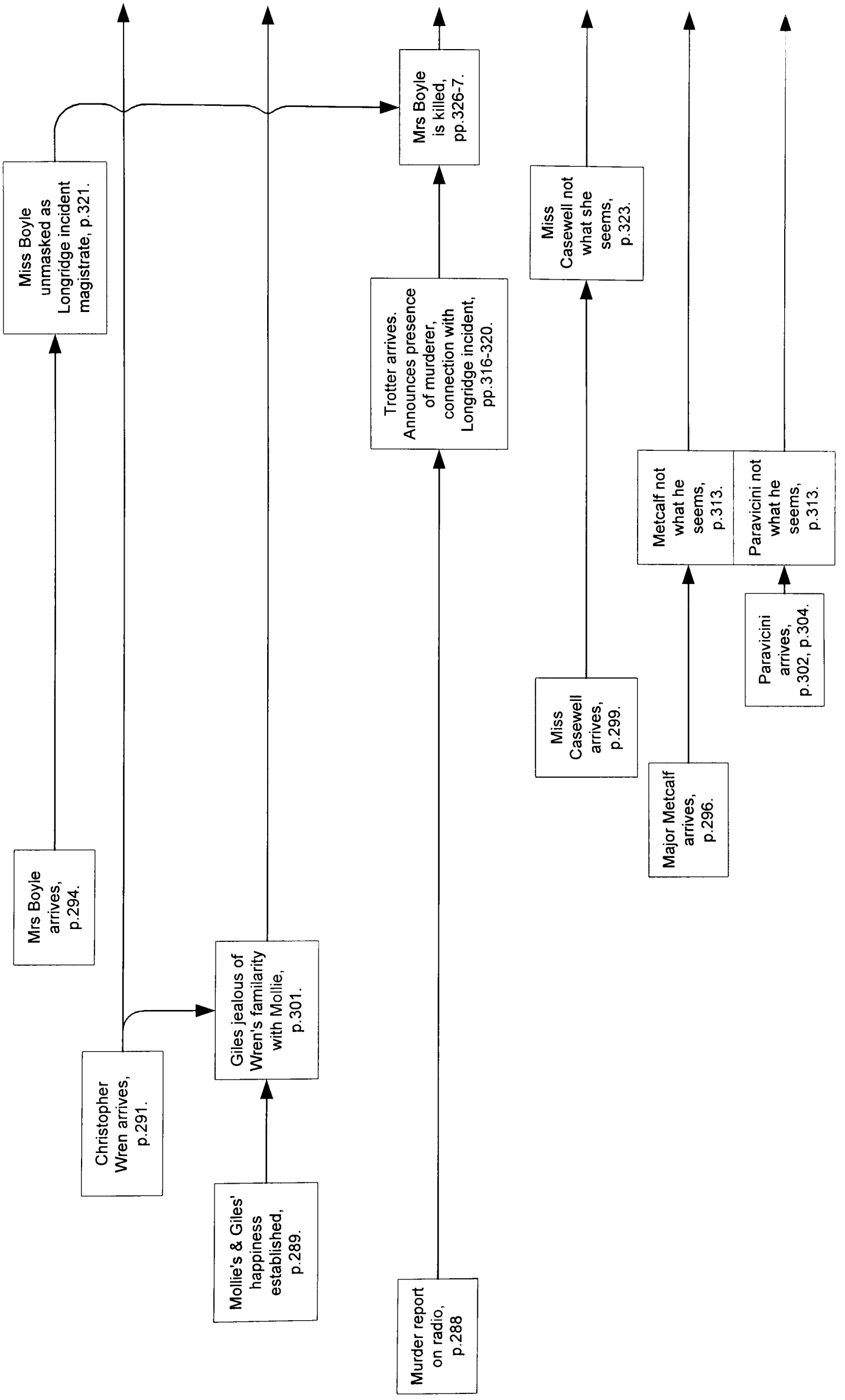

Figure 2.3a Plot diagram of *The Mousetrap*, Act 1.

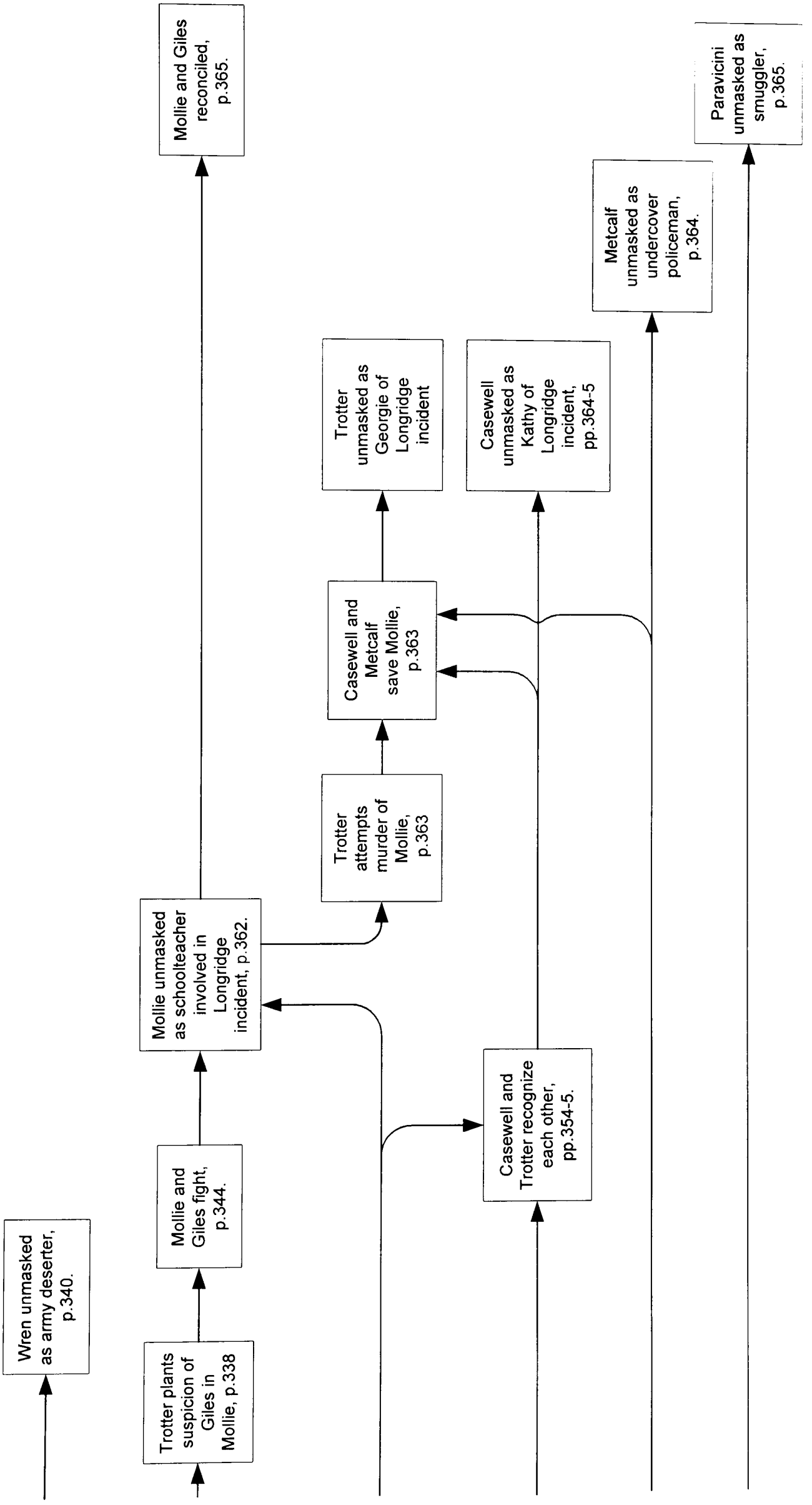

Figure 2.3b Plot diagram of *The Mousetrap*, Act 2.

Adopted by Scribe as an essential element of play construction, the Aristotelian concept of Unity of Action is a vital structural feature of *The Mousetrap*, and is perhaps accentuated by Christie's additional adherence to the Unities of Time and Place.[80] Using a method of playscript macro-analysisdeveloped by W.T. Price, play doctor to David Belasco (and later codified by Grebanier), we are able to discern the primary plot developments of the play. Price adapted the syllogism as a means of describing the internal inevitable logic that Aristotle advocated a plot should possess. The plot of *The Mousetrap* may be macro-analysed as follows:

Condition of the Action:	Trotter arrives at Monkswell Manor to find Mollie.
Cause of the Action:	After murdering Mrs Boyle, Trotter isolates Mollie by inciting her suspicion of everyone, including Giles.
Resulting Action:	Will Trotter kill Mollie?[81]

[80] The play's action takes place in the Great Hall of Monkswell Manor, in a period of less than 24 hours. Interestingly, novelist Dorothy L. Sayers wrote an article in 1936 in which she notes the many points of congruence between detective story structure and Aristotle's *Poetics*. See Sayers, D.L., 'Aristotle on Detective Fiction', *English*, 1(1936/1937), pp.23-35.

[81] The final statement of the Proposition is the first to be addressed, using the question 'What is the play about?' This is generally answered by the final event in the plot; for example, the last event in *Hamlet* could be said to be 'Will Hamlet kill Claudius?' The second statement of the Proposition is the occurrence which leads to the final event of the plot (Hamlet ascertains Claudius' guilt by means of the playlet); the first statement is the event which is the root of the action (Hamlet is told that Claudius murdered Hamlet's father). (Grebanier, B., *Playwriting*, New York, 1961, pp.86-89.) Though superficially very simple, the Price/Grebanier method is in fact a very powerful tool that enables accurate plot macro-analysis in a way that the traditional exposition-development-crisis-denouement method is not able. This perhaps more well-known form of playscript analysis enables us to chart the broad sweep of a play's storyline, and the potential emotional highlights of the piece for an audience; for example, in the case of *The Mousetrap* we could describe the storyline as follows:

> Exposition: Mollie and Giles have opened a guest house. Their guests arrive. A radio report details a murder in London that day.
>
> Development: Trotter arrives and announces the presence of a murderer in the house, looking for a person connected with a child abuse incident of some years previously. Mrs Boyle admits to the connection, and is later killed. All the people in the house begin to suspect each other.
>
> Crisis: Trotter reveals himself as the murderer and attempts to kill Mollie, who was the teacher of the children who had been victims of abuse.
>
> Denouement: Mollie is rescued, Trotter is reunited with his sister and will face justice for his crimes, and Mollie and Giles are reconciled.

The Price/Grebanier method, by contrast, gives us the *plot* of the play; that is to say, it enables us to distinguish those actions which are concatenated by means of motivation and logical necessity, which form an indication of what Stanislavski termed the 'spine' or 'super-objective' of the play. This spine or Action is the formal cause of the play – it is the reason why the play exists. The Price/Grebanier analysis enables the practitioner not only to discover the fundamental plot elements, but also a pointer towards the Action that can be presented to an audience, and the two primary characters who are essential to the presentation of this Action. (Gross, *op.cit.*, pp.109-111; Grebanier, *op.cit.*, pp.82-83; Taylor, *op.cit.*, pp.12-14) That there is a

Unlike Christie's *The Hollow*, where the many plot incidents are subdivided into sub-plots which often detract from the primary detective plotline, though *The Mousetrap* is relatively heavy on plot incidents, sub-plots are at a minimum, and do much to further the main action. [82] For example, the play begins with 'the wedding anniversary sub-plot': both Mollie and Giles arrive home after illicit shopping trips in London, and hide the anniversary presents they have bought. The sub-plot ends with the exchange of the gifts at the end of the play, after the detection of the murderer, and makes very few appearances through the main body of the play. It is, however, vitally important to the play's structure, as it provides Christie with a means of making Mollie's isolation by Trotter credible. Firstly, Trotter uses his discovery of the London newspaper in Giles' coat pocket as a means of inciting Mollie's suspicion of him. Additionally, Giles uses his discovery of the London bus ticket in Mollie's glove to further his suspicions of her involvement with Wren; this unfamiliar behaviour in turn causes Mollie to dwell upon her fears of what Giles' character really is.[83]

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difference between plot and storyline and the results of the two different analysis tools may be demonstrated by Taylor's discussion of the Henry Arthur Jones play *Mrs Dane's Defence*. Taylor says that the play has an elongated denouement after the main crisis scene, in which the characters debate the necessity that the character Lionel must give up Mrs Dane, and the inequity of Mrs Dane's love affair out of wedlock not being socially acceptable while another (male) character's imminent marriage to a widow is. It seems likely to me that what the crisis-denouement tool sees as an elongated denouement is possibly where the main Action of the plot is to be found; in Price's terms, it is the point at which we discover the Resulting Action. If this is so, the structural oddity of the play is not its denouement, but rather the emotional charge given to a scene which is not of fundamental importance to the plot and Action. (Taylor, *op.cit.*, pp.47-48)

[82] E.g. love scenes between Midge and Edward, Christie, *The Hollow* in *The Mousetrap and Selected Plays*, pp.267-9, pp.274-276.

[83] Christie, *The Mousetrap*, pp.342-345. The pattern of the subplot can be traced in Table 2.2.

A final contributor to Christie's Unity of Action in *The Mousetrap* is her careful structuring of the play's Climax. An Aristotelian term, Grebanier describes the Climax as being the turning point of the play, yet perversely also "almost *never* the most exciting moment of the drama." (*ibid.*, pp.107-108. See also Aristotle, *Poetics*, XI.2) The point of Climax in *The Mousetrap* occurs when Miss Casewell and Trotter seem to recognise each other, seeing through the other's mask. The event is significant for the audience because, although it seems likely that Miss Casewell is hiding information about her past and her identity, up until this moment the audience has had no reason to suppose that Trotter and Miss Casewell may be in any way connected, other than their both being present in Monkswell Manor. The revelation of their shared recognition, though its full significance cannot be appreciated until the end of the play, prepares the audience for the unmasking of the killer, and thence of all the other characters. (Christie, *The Mousetrap*, pp.306-308, 354-355)

Though Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* builds its plot more upon incidents arising from characterisation than events arising from external given circumstances, like *The Mousetrap* and many other plays of naturalistic heritage it benefits from a structure which is broadly Scribean in design. [84] Rattigan begins his drama with a 'late point of attack', using Hester's suicide attempt to begin the play at a point of emotional crisis, so as to immediately engage the audience's attention. Additionally, Rattigan uses Freddie's discovery of Hester's suicide note to propel the action and provoke Freddie's decision to leave; this stagecraft is a notable feature of Scribean technique.[85] Though composed of far fewer incidents than the plot of *The Mousetrap*, the plot of *The Deep Blue Sea* clearly exhibits Unity of Action, and could be described as follows using the Grebanier/Price Proposition:

Condition of the Action:	Hester attempts suicide as a result of her turmoil over her relationship with Freddie Page.
Cause of the Action:	Hester again contemplates suicide after Freddie announces he is leaving.
Resulting Action:	Will Hester live without Freddie?

The primary difference between Christie's use of Scribean structure and that of Rattigan is the latter's adoption of the Ibsenite technique of preferring psychological action as a spur for plot development over the Scribean emphasis on physical action. Though such events as Freddie finding Hester's suicide note are vital to the plot, it is Hester's reaction to these events which forwards the action; if Hester did not react dangerously to the news that Freddie was about to leave her, there would be no significance to their final meeting, and her decision to light the gas fire at the end of the play.

The basic similarity in plot structure between *The Mousetrap* and *The Deep Blue Sea* is the factor that suggests the plays to be equally relevant exemplars of the West End paradigm, even though they may differ in finer

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[84] Despite Strindberg's belief to the contrary, most naturalistic dramatists did in fact rely upon the well-made play structure to give definition to their material. For example, Ibsen in *Hedda Gabler* carefully separates the play into four acts, the first three sporting Scribean 'curtain-shocks': Hedda playing with the pistols in Act 1, manipulating Loevborg into joining the drinking party in Act 2, and burning the manuscript in Act 3. (See Strindberg, A., 'Preface to *Miss Julie*' in Brandt, G.W., ed., *Modern Theories of Drama*, Oxford, 1998, p.90; Styan, *op.cit.*, p.18; Witt, *op.cit.*, p.29; Ibsen, H., *Hedda Gabler* in *Plays: Two*, trans. M. Meyer, London, 1991, pp.272, 288-9, 317, 334)

[85] Stanton, *op.cit.*, p.xii; Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.153.

points of plotting technique. In Wittgensteinian terms, the two plays exhibit a *family resemblance*: the broadly Scribean structure that they share is analogous to the similarities of features (eye colour etc.) that occur within families.[86] Just as no two members of a family are generally identical, but exhibit a range of characteristics that may be visible in other family members to varying degrees, so too do *The Mousetrap* and *The Deep Blue Sea* coincide in some characteristics, but differ in others. The concept of family resemblance highlights that exemplars are not ideals; that is to say, that they are not perfect specimens by which other potential paradigm members may be measured. The child Johnny, whose efforts to learn about birdlife were discussed in Section 2.1.1, did not need to see an 'ideal' duck or goose in order to gain an understanding of the terms. Rather, it was in the breadth of examples of birdlife that he saw on the lake that allowed him to form matrices of understanding which he may use and add to for future reference. As an educator, his father made sure that for pedagogical purposes Johnny was exposed to wildfowl that exhibited as many typical duck-like characteristics as possible so as to facilitate his son's development of the concept. Similarly, no one play can be said to be the 'ideal' West End play, though certain plays may be said to exhibit a wider set of typical West End characteristics, and so are most promising as pedagogical tools.

Characterisation

Just as Christie's plot structure tends more towards the Scribean model than the naturalistic, so too is her characterisation more akin to Aristotelian notions of character than those of naturalism. Aristotle considered characterisation subordinate to the function of the plot in the working of drama:

> Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions... without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character.[87]

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[86] Wittgentstein, *PI*, §67.

[87] Aristotle, *Poetics*, VI.10.

The word here translated as 'character', ηθος, specifically refers to the moral element of the personality, "and reveals a certain state or direction of the will." Echoing this passage, Bernard Grebanier in 1961 suggested that budding playwrights should first construct the basic details of their plot, and only then fashion those characters necessary to the smooth running of that plot. In both Aristotle and Grebanier the moral dimension of the character is considered expendable: Grebanier goes so far as to suggest that Hamlet's soliloquies could be excised from Shakespeare's play without doing damage to the characterisation necessary to fulfil its action.[88] As we have already noted, depth of characterisation was not an essential feature of the detective play, placed in a decidedly inferior position of importance when compared to the plot. Robert Barnard notes that, even with Christie's most established characters such as Hercule Poirot, very little is given in the way of personal biography in order to flesh out the character:

> In spite of Poirot's long service with the Belgian police force one never gets a sense of him as a man with a past ... He exists only in the present, he has function rather than character.[89]

Every character in *The Mousetrap* is provided with a dilemma which must be resolved by the end of the play. These dilemmas are concerned with the question of identity, for as we have noted, every character except Giles Ralston at some point in the play lies about their antecedents. As a result of this effort to project false identities, Christie's characters have very little time to establish themselves with any three-dimensional qualities. For example, having spent the majority of the action attempting to convince both the other characters and the audience that Major Metcalf really *is* Major Metcalf, within seventeen lines at the end of the play he must assert his true identity as an undercover policeman.[90] Even within the bounds of escapist detective drama, this must surely be considered to stretch the bounds of credibility, indicating that even verisimilitude was expendable when placed in opposition to the smooth running of the plotline.

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[88] Butcher,*Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, pp.340, 344-345; Grebanier, *op.cit.*, pp.165, 220.

[89] Barnard, R., *A Talent to Deceive: An Appreciation of Agatha Christie*, London, 1980, p.105.

[90] Christie, *The Mousetrap*, p. 364f.

Rattigan's characterisations, as a result of his greater emphasis on naturalist notions of character-led plotting, are closer to naturalist models than those of Christie. Rattigan's main characters' more carefully drawn biographical histories not only add a patina of verisimilitude to the plotline, but give the characters an appearance of individuality. The need for such 'believability' in characters lies in the quasi-scientific roots of naturalist philosophy. Founders of stage naturalism intended the stage to be a type of quasi-experimental chamber, where experimental subjects (characters) could be observed 'behaving' by an audience so that an author's choice of psychological and social problems could be examined. This necessitated some degree of psychological verisimilitude to be present in characterisation: each character needed to seem 'as real as' ordinary people. Strindberg stated that, in *Miss Julie*:

> My souls (or characters) are conglomerations of past and present cultures, scraps from books and newspapers, fragments of humanity ... in just the way that a human soul is patched together.[91]

Compared to Mollie Ralston, such Rattigan creations as Hester Collyer, Freddie Page and even Mr Miller seem in varying degrees well-rounded personalities: the audience are privy to at least some aspects of their pasts, both biographical and emotional, and are able to use this information as a means of attributing motivation to their present actions. Miller, for example, may be said to be motivated in his attempts to help Hester by his own experiences of despair after being struck off the medical register. While this information is not strictly necessary to the plot – Miller could have been written simply as a nameless doctor who happened to live in the same building – the knowledge of his disgrace feeds the audience's desire for additional details that may add to the 'lifelikeness' of Hester's situation. The detail of the 'individuality' of Rattigan's characters is, however, in direct proportion to their importance and functionality in the plot. Through restrictions of time and necessities of plot, only main characters are given any significant amount of background to 'flesh them out'. Mrs Elton, for example, is little better than the near-ciphers of Christie's dramas. The

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[91] Strindberg in Brandt, *op.cit.*, p.93.

psychological verisimilitude given to major characters is equally illusory, for it too is fundamentally plot-centred: only those character traits that are useful to the explication of the plot are displayed. We do not, for example, learn about Freddie's childhood, or Hester's predilection for chocolates and tabby cats. The degree of 'natural behaviour' we see onstage is dependent upon utilitarian concerns over the smooth running of the narrative.

The primary point of congruence between *The Mousetrap* and *The Deep Blue Sea* in terms of characterisation is the middle-class status of all the protagonists. The characters of both plays are for the most part comfortably middle class though not necessarily monetarily comfortable.[92] For example, in *The Deep Blue Sea* Hester was the wife of a judge, Freddie an RAF and latterly a test pilot, and Mr Miller was a doctor before he was struck off, apparently for being homosexual.[93] In *The Mousetrap* Giles Ralston is the son of a barrister, Mrs Boyle a retired magistrate, Major Metcalf a retired army officer (later revealed as a policeman in disguise), and Mollie an ex-schoolteacher who has inherited Monkswell Manor. Of the other characters, only Paravicini's middle-class status is ever really in doubt, partly because of his sudden arrival, partly because of his strange manner and habit of wearing make-up, but mostly, one suspects, because he is foreign.[94] Rattigan echoes this usage of foreign characters in *The Deep Blue Sea*. Mr Miller, the most mysterious character in the play, is endowed with a faint German accent, and is described by a minor character as "phoney" immediately after his first appearance.[95] The importance of the middle-class status of West End characters is two-fold. Firstly, in dealing with the lives and concerns of the middle-class the West End dramatists were suiting their subject matter to their predominantly middle-class audience base. More importantly, however,

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[92] In *The Mousetrap* Mrs Boyle bemoans the lack of servants, which caused her to have to sell her house; Christie, *The Mousetrap*, p.306. In *Easy Money*, Philip Stafford resigns from the golf club in order to save money, and Ruth wonders if she could run the house without her housekeeper Martha; Ridley, *op.cit.*, pp.6-7.

[93] Rattigan, *DBS*, pp.348-349; also Darlow & Hodson, *op.cit.*, p.202.

[94] Christie, *The Mousetrap*, pp.336-7. Many times throughout Christie's novels Hercule Poirot is considered by other characters to be suspicious because of his nationality: "She was afraid that this queer little foreigner was going to be a nuisance." (Christie, A., *Peril at End House*, London, 1982, p.19.)

[95] Rattigan, *DBS*, p.304.

such characterisations were essential to the smooth running of the gently naturalistic West End plot structure. The need inherent in naturalism for the audience to be informed of the characters' personal and social dilemmas so that they may assess them in a quasi-scientific manner entails upon the dramatist the creation of characters that are sufficiently articulate to achieve clarity of thought and expression. Certainly in West End theatre this seems to have led to a concentration of dramatic interest away from working-class characters, presumably as a consequence of a decision that only middle-class characters could plausibly have sufficient education and articulacy to be able to successfully narrate the action of the play.[96]

Language Use

Another important point of commonality between Rattigan's and Christie's stagecraft, one that is echoed in other works of the West End paradigm, is their predominantly narrative use of language in dialogue. Both playwrights take advantage of secondary characters as sounding boards to receive the personal histories of the major protagonists. This is clearly seen in *The Deep Blue Sea*, where Sir William Collyer is used as the conduit whereby the audience can learn of the major emotional imbalance in Hester's relationship with Freddie.[97] In *The Mousetrap* the conferences called by Sergeant Trotter perform a similar function, providing an onstage audience via whom Christie can convey important background story information to the actual audience in a manner which does not distract from the smooth running of the plot. It is through Trotter's conferences that the audience learns of the Longridge Farm incident, information which is necessary for the audience's full understanding of why Mollie's life is placed in jeopardy at the end of the play.

Rattigan's language use is marked by its highly effective melding of naturalistic technique with the suppressive influence of the Lord Chamberlain. Naturalistic dialogue follows the push towards verisimilitude favoured in characterisation, requiring language use that approximates that

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[96] See Lacey, *op.cit.*, pp.56-57. Working-class characters were predominantly used as light comic relief or for conveying plot information of secondary importance, as in Christie's *The Hollow*. Christie, *The Hollow*, p.256.

[97] Rattigan, *DBS*, p.313.

of ordinary life. Strindberg, for example, in his 'Preface to *Miss Julie*' advertises the 'irregular' and 'wandering' dialogue and thought patterns with which he has invested his characters.[98] Rattigan combines this bias towards prosaic dialogue with the impulse towards the self-censorship of homosexual or other 'improper' material motivated by the organised censorship of the Lord Chamberlain, creating dialogue carefully constructed so as to convey a life (all too real to Rattigan himself) in which emotional dilemmas are hidden from the public gaze. Rattigan's characters use language as a means of disguise for deep emotion, eschewing histrionic displays for ruthlessly unemotional urbanities. Harold Hobson here describes Rattigan's dialogue in *The Browning Version*:

> There was not in it a single sentence that would in itself surpass the emotional level of a railway time-table. There was hardly a word that would be out of place in giving an order for a pound of vegetables.[99]

Much of *The Deep Blue Sea* depends for its dramatic effectiveness upon the utilisation of such technique. For example, immediately after attempting suicide, Hester shelters behind a veneer of polite civilities with her rescuers - "How do you do? Do you mind if I sit down?" By employing conventional small talk, Hester places herself in a socially superior position to the others in the room, thus deflecting any potentially embarrassing questions about her suicide attempt. Similarly, when Freddie finally leaves her at the end of the play, neither character indulges in lengthy speeches of passion or recrimination.

> Hester: Goodbye, Freddie.
> Freddie: Goodbye, Hes. Thank you for everything.
> Hester: Thank you, too.[100]

By keeping her own utterances to Freddie brusque, she forces Freddie to be equally brief, thus shielding herself from any potentially painful speeches that he might have made. This scene is elegant in the simplicity of its

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[98] Strindberg in Brandt, *op.cit.*, p.95.

[99] Hobson, H., *Theatre in Britain*, Oxford, 1984, p.148. Williams describes this method of dramatising emotion as being particular to naturalistic technique. Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, p.23.

[100] Rattigan, *DBS*, p.365.

expression of heartfelt emotion, and is perhaps the most sophisticated element of Rattigan's stagecraft, an element which in later chapters we shall see echoed in the work of Harold Pinter.[101]

2.2.2 Application/Instrumentation in the West End Paradigm

With regard to play production in the West End paradigm, it is as well that two plays were used as exemplars in the previous section, for neither *The Deep Blue Sea* nor *The Mousetrap* fulfil all the production patterns for an ideal West End progression from rehearsal to repertory. This is especially evident in the case of *The Mousetrap*, whose performance history is without precedent. Each play does, however, provide an illustration of many of the more typical elements of West End production, especially in the areas of theatre management, acting and directing, performance conditions and overall design concepts, sharing some as part of their West End 'family resemblance'.

One of the most easily discernible characteristics of the West End paradigm is the degree to which the ownership and management of theatrical businesses became monopolised by a few companies and individuals, particularly in the years following World War 2. Indeed, it is entirely reasonable to suggest that the Prince Littler Consolidated Trust, a conglomeration of entertainment companies and concerns, dominated the West End paradigm. This dominance, achieved through a particular set of financial and commercial circumstances existing immediately after the war, not only tells us much about the West End paradigm, but points to the wider principle that just as a scientific paradigm may be said to originate from one scientists (or group of scientists), so too does the theatrical paradigm generally owe much of its definition to one dominant management. The Prince Littler Consolidated Trust, or 'The Group', as it was known, took advantage of the aftermath of war – bomb-damaged theatres, managements bankrupted in part by a shortage of actors – to obtain at small expense a large cross-section of the British entertainment industry. By 1950 The Group

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[101] Rebellato, *op.cit.*, p.166.

owned 70 per cent of provincial theatres, and 43 per cent of theatres in the West End, as well as actors' agencies, design workshops and play production companies.[102] The Group had in essence a controlling interest in the West End theatre; aside from productions by the Old Vic Company and other (by comparison) small independent companies, the West End drama stages were dominated by productions by Trust subsidiary H.M. Tennent Ltd. Strictly speaking, 'Tennents', as it was popularly known, consisted of two sister companies: H.M. Tennent Ltd., the commercial arm, and the non-profit-making Tennent Productions, "which as its work was considered educational, later amended to '*partly* educational', was exempt from Entertainment Tax."[103] As by 1942 Entertainment Tax was levied at 33.3% of all box-office receipts, managing director Hugh 'Binkie' Beaumont's arrangement of Tennent Productions' exemption was a key factor in the success of the company.[104]

Though the importance of this tax exemption in the dominance of Tennents productions in the West End cannot be underestimated, Tennent Productions in particular presented to the public many of the most famous new plays and playwrights of the post-war era, including Rodney Ackland, Terence Rattigan, Robert Bolt and John Whiting.[105] It was, in Findlater's phrase, a 'benign monopoly', which unlike many of the smaller managements attempted to experiment with work that was likely to be unprofitable.[106] Even a tax exempt company, however, had to be cautious about production costs, a caution greatly amplified in the commercial theatre proper. High rent charges from theatre lessees and the burden of the Entertainment Tax were only two factors included in production costs. Findlater estimated that a small cast play with only two scene changes would cost £1500 per week to

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[102] Elsom, *op.cit.*, pp.12-13; Findlater, R., *The Unholy Trade*, p.42; *Theatre Ownership in Britain*, London, 1953, pp.30-33.

[103] Duff, *op.cit.*, p.53; also Rebellato, *op.cit.*, pp.53-54. Beaumont achieved tax exempt status by organising a partnership with the Council for the Encouragement of Music and Art (CEMA).

[104] Findlater, *op.cit.*, p.41.

[105] Tennent Productions in particular seems to have been used as a testing ground for new writers, and as a home for serious drama which did not necessarily entertain hope of mainstream commercial success. (Duff, *op.cit.*, pp.54-55).

[106] Findlater, *op.cit.*, pp.44, 45.

run, with rehearsal costs of around £3000 and additional expense for the sets and costumes. Small cast modern dress plays with limited setting requirements were, therefore, to be preferred by production management, as they kept costs low. For example, Peter Saunders, the producer of Agatha Christie's plays, initially sent back the first draft of *The Mousetrap*, telling Christie that with two sets and ten actors the play was not economical. She duly rewrote, cutting one set and two actors to create the finished version.[107] Equally, both Tennents and independent impresarios such as Peter Saunders followed similar procedures with regard to rehearsal practices and methods of perfecting a production during its run, with a view to minimising cost. H.M. Tennent Ltd. would generally hold the first reading of a new play with the cast six weeks before the beginning of rehearsals so that the writer would have time to make any necessary changes to the text. Four weeks of rehearsals would be followed by four weeks touring and four weeks at the Lyric Hammersmith, culminating in a West End opening. This pattern is demonstrated in the performance history of *The Holly and the Ivy* by Wynyard Browne, first produced in 1950. After opening in Cardiff in February of that year for out-of-town tryouts, the play appeared briefly at Cambridge, moving to Hammersmith in March before settling at the Duchess Theatre for its official opening on 10 May. [108] Similarly, *The Mousetrap* underwent an extensive provincial tour before opening in London on 25 November 1952. Beginning in Nottingham on 6 October, the production subsequently visited Oxford, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Leeds and Birmingham. [109] The out-of-town tryouts not only gave the play enough polish to make it more likely to succeed before London playgoers used to the ease and professionalism of cinematic entertainment, it helped the management

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[107] See also *ibid.*, p.39; Priestley, *Johnson over Jordan*, London, 1939, p.128:

> One simple set and a few player were all that I had asked, time after time. It pays a dramatist to be modest in this fashion because it means that not only are the initial costs of production in the West End much smaller, but that touring, repertory, and amateur rights are more in demand.

[108] Duff, *op.cit.*, pp.130, 58, 79, 81.

[109] Interestingly, *The Deep Blue Sea* did not follow this pattern, having only a brief tryout in Brighton before the premiere at the Duchess Theatre: presumably Rattigan's reputation and proven abilities, added to the changes already made to the text as discussed earlier, made a provincial tour unnecessary. *The Mousetrap Story*, souvenir publication, designed by J. Wood, London, 1996, p.28; Darlow & Hodson, *op.cit.*, p.198.

recoup some of the costs of the production while the play was still essentially in rehearsal.[110]

A management's main hope of defraying production costs was for their play to have a long run in a West End theatre, preferably with high box office takings in the early weeks. The London production of *The Mousetrap* is a remarkable example of the lengths to which a manager would safeguard a play's run. Perhaps anticipating its commercial potential, Saunders made an agreement with Agatha Christie, prohibiting the production of the play on Broadway, on tour of the USA, or in Australia, until the closure of the London production. A similar proviso was also applied (and still applies) to the film rights, thus ensuring the exclusivity of the London production, and guaranteeing steady audience figures.[111] The long run of a play was made paramount by the intricacies of the Entertainment Tax, as Findlater noted:

> The theatre pays the full rate of tax on all seats sold from the first day of the run, irrespective of the success or failure of the production. It is not the profits, but the gross box-office receipts, that are taxed, and it is possible – indeed it is common – for the Exchequer to make a big profit out of a three week run on which the management may have lost several thousand pounds.[112]

The West End paradigm thus contained within it a strong motivation for the clear definition and exhaustive propagation of its constituent elements: managers would wish to replicate previous successes by producing new work as similar as possible to what they had produced previously. This powerful normalising force was, however, also the seed of the paradigm's downfall, for this painstaking replication of previous works created a hardening of audience expectations, which in turn prevented even modest experiments of subject matter and form such as those by Whiting and Ackland from achieving the box office takings needed to encourage the promotion of their talent by even sympathetic managements such as Beaumont's. The true box office successes were made by such playwrights as Christie, who gave her

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[110] Findlater, *op.cit.*, p.202.

[111] Trewin, J.C., *op.cit.* in Keating, *op.cit.*, p.139; *The Mousetrap Story*, p.27. Christie's grandson Mathew Pritchard now controls the copyright. See Christie, *An Autobiography*, p.513. The original purchasers of the film rights have since died; the rights are currently held by their heirs. Sanders & Lovallo,*The Agatha Christie Companion*, London, 1985, p.410.

[112] Findlater, *op.cit.*, p.40.

audience conservative English values and genteel mysteries in neat packaging that hardly needed to vary from play to play.[113] The stagnation that resulted was a motivating factor in the beginnings of experimentation instigated by such writers as Eliot and Priestley, discussed in the next chapter.

After completing a run in the West End, typically Beaumont would send out touring productions while he still controlled the copyright, as occurred with *The Holly and the Ivy*. After copyright lapsed, any repertory theatre could attempt to secure the rights.

> Repertory Theatres usually made do with the year-before-last's West End successes because last year that success had been on an extended provincial tour with the play's copyright unreleased... British Theatre became increasingly centralised.[114]

It seems to be the case that certain 'safe' plays enjoyed many revivals across the country, perhaps because of their modest set and actor requirements, or perhaps because their subject matter was sufficiently interesting or amusing to help draw audiences. Most repertory companies, in addition to the burden of the Entertainment Tax, also had a smaller population density upon which they could draw for their audiences than the London theatres, thus making turnover small and potentially unstable, and profit margins equally diminutive. *The Holly and the Ivy* proved immensely popular in repertory theatres, as did almost any play by Agatha Christie. The degree of Christie's popularity is indicated by the large number of roles taken by Harold Pinter in Christie plays in his relatively short acting career, seen in Figure 2.4. Though *The Mousetrap* never made the journey into repertory, it seems safe to assume that it would have been at least equally as popular as Christie's other plays.

The West End paradigm, in addition to its management structures and performance practices, evinces clearly discernible trends in the fields of

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[113] This is perhaps more true of Christie's novels than her plays. However, it must be remembered that Christie's theatre audiences were almost certainly familiar with her bestsellers, and had garnered their expectations of what they were about to see from their reading.

[114] Duff, *op.cit.*, p.17.

Year/Date	Play	Company	Role
1954			
11 June	*Murder at the Vicarage*	Whitby Spa Repertory Company	Sophisticated Artist
29 November	*Ten Little Niggers*	Huddersfield Repertory Company	Major role
1955			
14 November	*Witness for the Prosecution*	Colchester Repertory Company	Defending Counsel
1956			
9 April	*Peril at End House*	Barry O'Brien Company at Palace Court, Bournemouth	Captain Hastings
25 June	*The Hollow*	As above	Minor role
13 August	*Love from a Stranger*	As above	Maniacal killer
8 October	*Spider's Web*	Philip Barrett's New Malvern Company at the Pavilion, Torquay	Leading role
12 November	*Love from a Stranger*	As above	Maniacal killer
1957			
6 March	*Spider's Web*	Alexandra Repertory Company, Birmingham	Inspector
1959			
9 March	*The Hollow*	Richmond Theatre, London	Minor role

Figure 2.4 Harold Pinter's acting appearances in Agatha Christie's plays. Dates given are of first performance.[115]

[115] Information taken from Thompson, D., *op.cit.*, pp.129-137.

acting, directing, and lighting, set and costume design. Acting in the West End is best described as a curious juxtaposition of methodology. On one hand the actor utilised tricks and technique learnt in repertory, where the brevity of rehearsals necessitated having little time for subtleties of characterisation, while on the other was the more psychological approach adapted from Stanislavski.[116] In both cases the style was realistic in the manner initiated by Gerald du Maurier, who spent hours rehearsing his 'business' juggling drinks and cigarette holders before a mirror to achieve his desired degree of casualness.[117] Roles in plays were divided into character types, which were used as an aid to casting. Actors were categorised as lead, character or juvenile, and would only be considered for roles conforming to their perceived character type.[118] The West End acting profession was also dominated by the 'star system', where the success of a new play could be almost guaranteed by the casting of a popular actor in the leading role. Harold Hobson divided the profession into two categories; the *acteur* was one who imposed his/her own personality on a part, such as John Gielgud or Laurence Olivier, while the *comédien* was one who became immersed in a role, such as Alec Guinness. In either case, the audience would attend the play in order to see the actor, either to judge how successfully they would make a character theirs, or how successfully they would disguise themselves in the new performance.[119] Both *The Deep Blue Sea* and *The Mousetrap* demonstrate the working of the star system. *The Mousetrap* in its first year had two major stars, Richard Attenborough and Sheila Sim, in the lead roles, while the producers of *The Deep Blue Sea* were prepared to hold back its production for six months in order to secure Peggy Ashcroft in the role of Hester.[120]

Directing in the West End paradigm was still a relatively new profession, having grown out of the demise of the actor-manager and the rise of the

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[116] Rebellato, *op.cit.*, p.78.

[117] Sanderson, M., *From Irving to Olivier*, London, 1984, p.188f.

[118] Cairns, A., *The Making of the Professional Actor*, London, 1996, p.152.

[119] Elsom, *op.cit.*, p.21; Guthrie, T., *Tyrone Guthrie on Acting*, London, 1971, pp.19-20; Rebellato, *op.cit.*, p.79; Billington, M., *The Modern Actor*, London, 1973, p.89.

[120] Hobson, H., 'Sir Peter Saunders' in *The Mousetrap Story*, p.7; Duff, *op.cit.*, p.129.

naturalistic psychological drama at the turn of the century.[121] The 1930s and 1940s saw the arrival of the professional director, as such people as Tyrone Guthrie and Frith Banbury gave up acting in order to direct full-time.[122] Directors were sometimes reviled by actors for wielding undeserved authority, but were increasingly accepted as holding a position either equal to or more important than the playwright; this is indicated by the payments they received for the publication of acting editions of their productions.[123] The West End paradigm is also characterised by particular conventions in theatrical design. For example, Richard Pilbrow and Tennent employee Joe Davis invented the position of lighting designer, creating the new role from the previously combined responsibility for lighting shared by the stage manager, director and electrician. Davis and Pilbrow were responsible for the rigs in "nearly every West End show in the fifties", another means by which they extended their influence into widespread theatre practice.[124] The inventive effects created by Davis and Pilbrow were partially derived from experience adapting the lighting plots of the original productions of such American plays as *The Glass Menagerie* and *Death of a Salesman.*

Additionally, lighting innovations developed at this time included front-of-house lighting. The resultant improvement of illumination was responsible for the declining use of greasepaint, as it allowed for a more natural facial appearance through increased visibility.[125]

With respect to costume design, West End shows were considered bastions of glamour. Leading females in high budget Tennents productions were sent to Paris for fittings, and the clothes brought into England by the couturier in her own luggage to avoid customs duty. Lesser budget productions used the talents of Tennents' own wardrobe mistress, who worked hard to make actors look and feel good on the stage. By contrast, many repertory companies carried on the turn-of-the-century tradition of expecting actors to provide

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[121] Sanderson, *op.cit.*, pp.183-185.

[122] Cairns, *op.cit.*, p.127; Duff, *op.cit.*, p.51f.

[123] Rebellato, *op.cit.*, pp.86-87; Hunt, H., *The Director in the Theatre*, London, 1954, p.60.

[124] Duff, *op.cit.*, p.99; Pilbrow, R., *Stage Lighting*, rev. ed., London, 1979, p.32.

[125] Rebellato, *op.cit.*, p.90f; Duff, *op.cit.*, p.99.

their own costumes. Demobbed actors after WW2 were given additional funds by the Ministry of Labour so they could buy an extra suit in which they could appear onstage. In both cases actors wore clothing similar to the average person on the street, contributing to the overall realistic effect of the productions.[126] The emphasis on glamour seen in the costumes of the West End paradigm was also considered a major factor in its set design. The painterly approach favoured by Oliver Messel, Cecil Beaton and other designers of the 1940s and 1950s created stage pictures intended to be sufficiently impressive to be an audience draw card in their own right. Indeed, the privileged backgrounds enjoyed by Messel and Beaton placed them and their work at the heart of fashionable society.[127] This tendency towards flamboyant design is evident in both the set designs that have been used in the London run of *The Mousetrap*. Both the original setting (Figure 2.5), designed by Roger Furse, and its replacement (Figure 2.6), designed by Anthony Holland in 1965 and still in use, appear in photographs to be relatively sumptuous in detail. Most of Christie's most popular plays were set in grand houses, allowing designers the opportunity to create alluring stage pictures. Both the Furse and Holland settings are realistic box sets; the Holland design is so conscientious in attempting to attain the impression of a real room in a country house that even a ceiling has been included, arguably to the detriment of the effectiveness of the lighting design, as only front-of-house bars can effectively be used to illuminate the stage. The realistic impression has been aided by some of the play's twenty directors, who on occasions have asked for such effects as real melting snow, and a burning pie belching real smoke.[128]

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[126] Rebellato, *op.cit.*, pp.94-96; Sanderson, *op.cit.*, p.277; Duff, *op.cit.*, pp.99, 117.

[127] Strong, R., 'The Years Before' in Goodwin, J., ed., *British Theatre Design: the Modern Age*, London, 1989, pp.17-19; Rebellato, *op.cit.*, p.94.

[128] *The Mousetrap Story*, p.27.

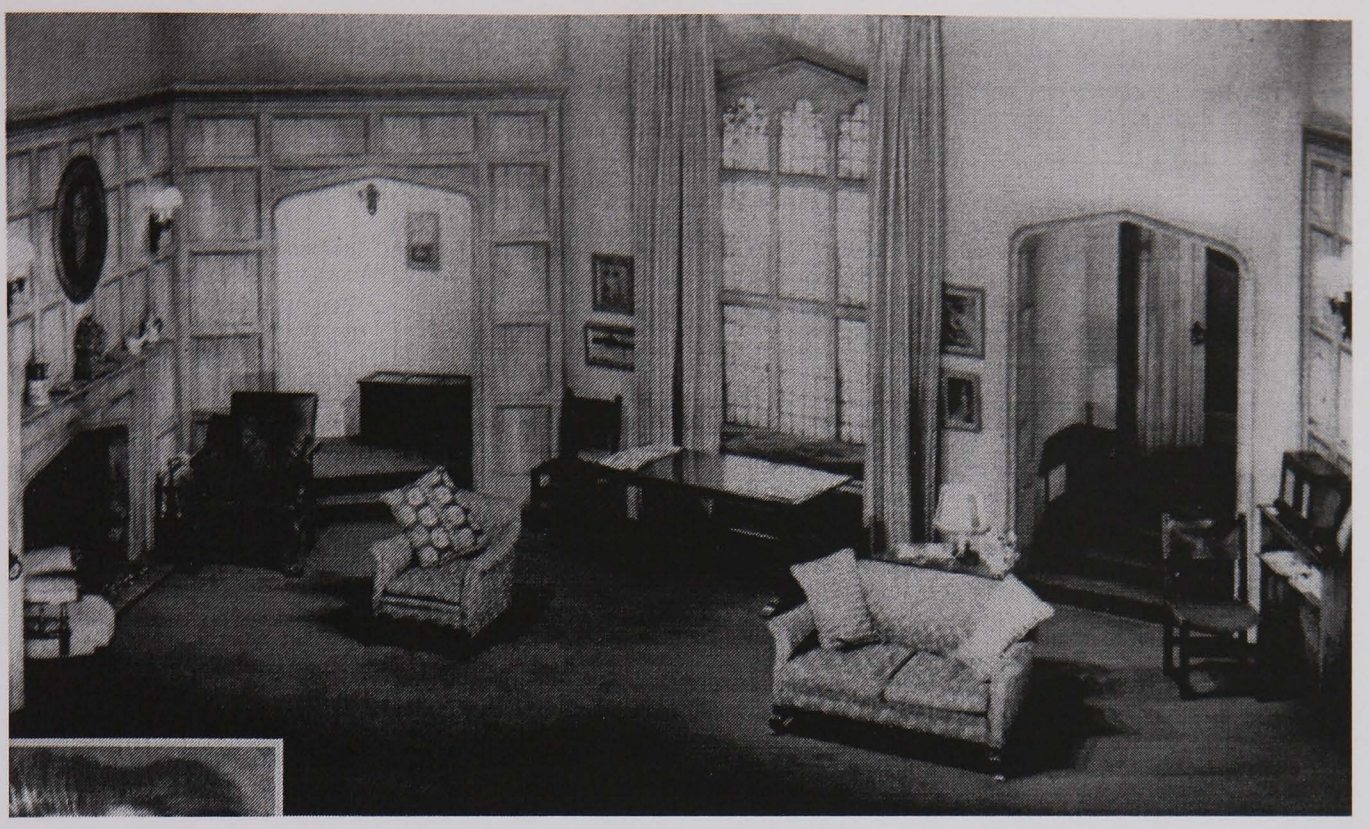

Figure 2.5 The original *Mousetrap* set, designed by Roger Furse.[129]

Figure 2.6 The 1965 *Mousetrap* set, designed by Anthony Holland.

[129] Photographs in Figures 2.5 and 2.6 taken from *The Mousetrap Story*, p.85.

2.3 Concluding Remarks

A close examination of the 1952 productions of *The Deep Blue Sea* and *The Mousetrap* has revealed that the West End paradigm operated through a number of conventions in both playwriting technique and the mechanics of stage production. The playwrights' subject matter was restricted by Lord Chamberlain and, to some extent, by public sensibilities, but nevertheless such writers as Rattigan and Whiting attempted serious examinations of issues affecting the modern individual: how to live and behave as an individual in society. In both plays plot structure was influenced by the Scribean well-made play, but *The Deep Blue Sea* also bore signs of naturalistic technique in its use of character as the driving force behind the action. As a result, Rattigan's characters were carefully drawn and relatively well-rounded, whereas Christie's characters, by virtue of the supreme importance of plotting in detective drama, were little more than ciphers. Both writers used dialogue in a narrative capacity; that is, information important to the audience's understanding of the plot was embedded in the character's conversations. Rattigan also used language as a means of creating dramatic tension through suppressing characters' intense emotion under everyday vocabulary and small talk. With regard to the production of the playscripts, though *The Mousetrap* was handled by an independent producer, Peter Saunders, it shared with the H.M. Tennent Ltd. production of *The Deep Blue Sea* a number of managerial practices: short rehearsal periods, provincial try-outs, and long runs with changes of main cast members. Both productions sported star actors and well-known directors, and *The Mousetrap* exhibits the West End pre-occupation with glamour in its relatively sumptuous set designs.

However, the significance of *The Mousetrap* and *The Deep Blue Sea* does not lie merely in their position as suitable exemplars by which to approach the West End paradigm, but also in the fact of their highlighting several other important points regarding the dissemination of paradigms. In determining the structure of *The Mousetrap*, we used a method of analysis developed by W.T. Price and codified by Bernard Grebanier, which is substantially based upon Aristotle's discussion of tragedy in *The Poetics*. Aristotle based his work upon a retrospective study of Greek theatre: *The Poetics* was written around

330 BC, two hundred years after the composition of the plays he most frequently cites.[130] Aristotle was thus not attempting to influence dramatic practice through the application of a set of rules, but rather was attempting to abstract from the raw data of the plays, criteria by which their structure may be discerned and relative merits discussed.[131] In other words, Aristotelian poetics and other analysis methods derived from it are paradigmatic analysis tools: a means by which critics and practitioners are able to discern a play's paradigmatic elements of structure, characterisation, subject matter, and so on. Grebanier takes this process of analysis a step further, for, as is suggested by the title of his book *Playwriting*, he adapts Aristotelian analysis in order to suggest a broadly Aristotelian plot structure as the best template for the budding playwright. Here Grebanier is demonstrating the means by which paradigms are developed and passed on to others; as noted in Section 2.1.2 with the example of stage lighting, the exemplars and abstracted laws and applications are codified and used by educators both as learning material for the student, and a means by which that student's progress may be evaluated. The development of such texts as Grebanier's is central to the process of a paradigm's self-perpetuation, which Thomas Kuhn describes as Normal Science.[132]

The use of methods of analysis, like scientific instruments, implies a way of viewing the world and an opinion on what is valuable. In chemistry, use of a triple beam balance in a particular experiment implies a belief in the concept of mass, and an opinion of its value in the experiment, relegating other values such as pH to irrelevance. Similarly, the use of the Grebanier analysis in the research of a play implies a belief in the value of Unity of Action, and implies a certain disregard of playscripts dependent upon other structural devices, such as cyclical or episodic. In a very real sense, when using a particular analysis method, a practitioner determines what features they look for in a playscript, and by extension determines what sort of features they will find. This becomes problematic when less and less of the playscript

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[130] e.g. Sophocles' *Oedipus*, Aristotle, *Poetics*, XVI.8.

[131] Barnes, J. ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, Cambridge, 1995, p.283.

[132] Kuhn, *SSR*, pp.19-21, 136-8.

becomes explainable using currently fashionable analysis tools, as playwrights begin to adapt or completely jettison a number of paradigmatic conventions in order that they may better represent reality. In the next chapter we shall examine just this phenomenon in relation to Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, which though explicable in purely Aristotelian terms, begins to touch the limits of that analytical method, and reach towards another tool, and another paradigm.

3. Anomalous Theatre in the West End Paradigm

Both this chapter and Chapter 4 demonstrate the ways in which the constituents of a paradigm – applications, exemplars and so on – may be placed under stress when they fail to provide an adequate representation of reality.[1] Section 3.1 discusses Normal Science, the unquestioning problem-solving research activity undertaken when a paradigm becomes dominant. It is this state of research that provides the backdrop for the conditions of Kuhnian Crisis. Section 3.2 discusses the nature of anomalies in science and the patterns of research that attempt to control an anomaly and reconcile it with the dominant paradigm. The remainder of this chapter examines a tension within the West End paradigm, equivalent to scientific anomaly, that certain playwrights recognised in the paradigm from relatively early in its conception. The recognition that West End theatre, and naturalism in general, was unwilling to admit to its inherent structuring of plot, dialogue and setting, and that the emphasis on external verisimilitude had caused in West End theatre a decrease in willingness to explore themes involving major philosophical concepts or issues of perception and human imagination, led to the attempt by certain playwrights and theatrical managements to create works that moved beyond naturalism in language, structure and thematic content. The absorption of many of these attempts back into the dominant paradigm did not alleviate either the anomaly within West End theatre or the growing sense of dissatisfaction with it, culminating in the Crisis period of the 1950s that is the subject of the next chapter.

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[1] Contrary to much public opinion, the nature of reality has long been a topic of dissent among scientists. Hacking summarises the two main camps:

> *Scientific realism* syas that the entities, states and processes described by correct theories really do exist... Even when our sciences have not yet got things right, the realist holds that we often get close to the truth ... *Anti-realism* says the opposite: there are no such things as electrons. Certainly there are phenomena of electricity and of inheritance but we construct theories about tiny states, processes and entities only in order to predict and procude events that interest us. The electrons are fictions. Theories about them are tools for thinking... we should not regard even [the] most telling theories as true. (Hacking, I., *Representing and Intervening*, Cambridge, 1983, p.21.)

3.1 Normal Science and the Emergence of Anomalies

Before examining the conditions which led to the questioning and undermining of a dominant paradigm, it is first necessary to detail some of the criteria that characterise the actions of a paradigm while it is dominant, for it is the very nature of the research activity carried out that leads to the recognition of anomalies within the paradigm and, eventually, to the search outside the paradigm for their solution. On occasion, certain paradigms become widely followed, with large numbers of practitioners of a discipline collecting and interpreting data within those paradigms. It should be recognised, however, that a paradigm, particularly in its early stages, may have a popularity that belies its incomprehensive nature.

> Paradigms gain their status because they are more successful than their competitors in solving a few problems that the group of practitioners has come to recognize as acute. To be more successful is not, however, to be either completely successful with a single problem or notably successful with any large number. The success of a paradigm... is at the start largely a promise of success discoverable in selected and still incomplete examples.[2]

A new paradigm may be extremely successful in the explication of at least one major problem, but will also contain many small problems or inconsistencies that have been created by the change in the perception of reality that necessarily results from the paradigm 'shift'. The process of solving these problems and the consequent attitudes to the scientific enterprise Kuhn describes as 'normal science'.

Normal science, Kuhn argues, primarily consists of the 'mopping-up' of the paradigm's inconsistencies, an activity that requires a very different process of research to that evinced prior to the paradigm's widespread acceptance. When a paradigm is still in its infancy, a practitioner or group of practitioners will concentrate upon a problem which the previous paradigm had been unable to solve. For example, in late 19th century Russia Stanislavski, Shchepkin and others concentrated upon finding a way of making acting more 'natural' in a way that could be reliably repeated every performance. This constituted the aim of their research, but as they were operating in an area where they were conscious of the previous paradigm's

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[2] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.23f.

failure, they had no established tools or methods of working that could aid them in their research. Training at the Petersburg Imperial Theatre School in the early 1900s, for example, consisted of lessons in declamation, elocutionary art and recitation to music; teachers such as Yakoklev firmly believed in the importance of 'temperament' to the actor, encouraging them to 'pump' themselves by repeating again and again the scene in which they had failed.[3] Faced with a lack of established methodology through which to carry out their research into repeatable realistic characterisation, Stanislavski and Shchepkin were placed in the position of 'trailblazers' who, especially early in their careers, often proceeded as much by trial and error as by methodical experimentation.[4]

Research within a normal science, by contrast with the hit-and-miss discovery process of pre- or early-paradigm researches, is extremely well-regulated, with demonstrable confidence in its exemplars and applications. This is demonstrated by the difference in the styles of written work produced during the formation of a paradigm, as opposed to that produced when a paradigm is widely accepted. The beginnings of a paradigm are marked by the publication of such books as Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, Darwin's *Origin of Species* or Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*: books which attempt to introduce to as wide an audience as possible a new theory, explaining it from first principles.[5] In contrast, the establishment of a paradigm into Normal Science encourages a very different variety of documentation. Rather than books working from first principles, a scientist's findings

> will usually appear as brief articles addressed only to professional colleagues, the men whose knowledge of a shared

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[3] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, London, 1982, pp.2, 5, 7; Toporkov, V.O., *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, New York, 1998, pp.27, 25, 29, 43.

[4] Edwards, C., *The Stanislavsky Heritage*, London, 1966, p.16.

[5] For example, at the beginning of *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski describes the student Kostya's first attempt to rehearse and perform a role. This gives Stanislavski the opportunity to describe many of the problems an actor would commonly face when working outside the Stanislavskian paradigm: fear of the 'black hole' of the auditorium, lack of adequate rehearsal time, lack of adequate direction, and lack of technique, conditions described earlier by Toporkov as being typical of Russian theatre of the time. Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, London, 1981, pp.3-8; Edwards, *op.cit.*, pp.13-14.

> paradigm can be assumed and who prove to be the only ones able to read the papers addressed to them.[6]

Periods of normal science are also characterized, according to Kuhn, by the extensive writing and revision of textbooks for schools and universities. In part this rewriting is directed towards the better theoretical articulation of the paradigm, for despite the importance of such a pre-paradigm work as Newton's *Principia*, it would not always be considered as a suitable educational text, "because it retained some of the clumsiness inevitable in a first venture, and partly because so much of its meaning was only implicit in its applications."[7] By contrast, normal science textbooks seek to bolster the authority of the paradigm by selectively reinterpreting scientific history in the light of the new exemplars, laws and applications.

> Partly by selection and partly by distortion, the scientists of earlier ages are implicitly represented as having worked upon the same set of fixed problems and in accordance with the same set of fixed canons that the most recent revolution in scientific theory and method has made seem scientific.[8]

However unfortunate such a manipulation of history may seem, it attains some justification when considered in the terms of science pedagogy. If the aim of the teacher is to instil in the students a sound knowledge of the current dominant paradigm (as is suggested by the analogy with the father teaching his son how to identify birdlife), then there is nothing to be gained by simultaneously teaching the fundamentals of a superseded paradigm. The aim of the teacher, and thus of the textbook, is to provide students with a means of understanding the significance of the discovery in question within the boundaries of the current paradigm, using currently acceptable terminology. Eventually a particular discovery may be so widely accepted that authors of textbooks no longer feel obliged to legitimate it in the way described above, but rather present the discovery as unassailable fact. This procedure can be seen to have taken place with Stanislavskian acting methodology, which has become so widely disseminated that elements of the

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[6] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.20.

[7] *ibid.*

[8] *ibid.*, pp.33, 138. For example, modern chemistry textbooks may well suggest that in the 1770s scientists Scheele, Priestley, Lavoisier and Bayen all participated in a race for the discovery of oxygen, though this view is not entirely historically accurate. Kuhn, *ET*, pp.166-171.

training may appear in books on acting intended for non-actors or amateurs without any acknowledgement of their originator. For example, Griffiths' *Stagecraft* advises would-be actors to construct character biographies, and to use the 'magic if' to assist in personal identification with the character's dilemmas; both techniques are directly discussed in Stanislavski's works.[9]

Of the primary modes of research described by Thomas Kuhn as occurring during periods of normal science, the one most particularly relevant to theatre studies research is "empirical work undertaken to articulate the paradigm theory, resolving some of its residual ambiguities and permitting the solution of problems to which it had previously only drawn attention."[10] This type of research may be identified in the work in which Stanislavski was engaged at the end of his life, to create an artistically successful production of Moliere's *Tartuffe*. Stanislavski had two main aims in attempting the production, the first being the development of his acting system. *Tartuffe* was an experimental production, its lengthy improvisationally-centred rehearsals being intended primarily as the means by which Stanislavski could refine his new Method of Physical Actions and assess its ability to improve his actors' technical preparation. Stanislavski was keen in particular to test his improvements on his acting system on a classic play; it had long been his wish to demonstrate the applicability of his System to more than plays of the Russian naturalistic tradition. Previous

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[9] Toporkov, *op.cit.*, pp.44-47; Stanislavski, *op.cit.*, pp.46-47; Griffiths, *Stagecraft*, pp.62, 65.

[10] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.27. The second area of normal science research involves the close research into certain data or facts that have been revealed to be highly important within the paradigm's explanation of phenomena, with the intention of improving their precision and widening the number of situations in which they may be used. According to Kuhn, research of this nature is that most frequently discussed in scientific literature, and occurs in all disciplines. For example, in chemistry much work was made into the precision of measurements of the boiling points, atomic weights and acidity of elements and solutions. (Kuhn, *SSR*, p.25.) In the course of such research a scientist may adapt apparatus, alter the method of its use, or even invent new equipment in order to improve the accuracy of a measurement; many have based highly successful careers on just such work. This kind of research, however, has limitations, for though we may see, for example, a specific figure listed for the atomic weight of an element in the periodic table, this figure was almost certainly reached through a process of discussion and compromise. An experiment designed to produce such a figure would be repeated many times, generating a spectrum of results, and scientists would then choose a suitable 'best-fit' or mean figure from the spectrum by 'reasonable agreement'. There is, therefore, a window of doubt and uncertainty that is inherent in the normal science process, which in certain circumstances may later become one of the causes of the paradigm's destruction. (Kuhn, *ET*, p.185; Wittgenstein, *PI*, §88.) The third major area of normal science research involves the invention of new technological apparatus. Kuhn, *SSR*, p.31; Hey and Walters, *Einstein's Mirror*, Cambridge, 1997, pp.197-198.

experiments with the classical repertoire, such as Stanislavski's collaboration with Gordon Craig on *Hamlet* in 1912, had been beset with creative difficulties.[11] Though the production of *Hamlet* was a financial success, Stanislavski recognised its artistic shortcomings.

> I realized that we ... had mastered certain methods of the new inner technique, that we could apply them successfully in modern plays, but that we had not found analogous methods to perform lofty, heroic plays, and that in this sphere there was much difficult work for us ahead.[12]

Tartuffe opened to great acclaim after Stanislavski's death, thus apparently overturning his previous failures with *Hamlet* and *Othello* and demonstrating the universality of his acting system.[13] It is important to note that early failures to confirm the applicability of the System to non-naturalistic theatre forms did not deter Stanislavski or cause him to jettison his theories. Rather, he worked to refine his technique, applying it to other works (creating new experiments) until he achieved his aim. Kuhn notes that scientists display just this degree of adherence to scientific paradigms, and that it is an important factor in the lasting nature of paradigms.

> By ensuring that the paradigm will not be too easily surrendered, resistance guarantees that scientists will not be lightly distracted and that the anomalies that lead to paradigm change will penetrate existing knowledge to the core.[14]

This resistance to anomalous data is demonstrated by Kuhn through reference to the 1949 card experiment which was briefly discussed in Chapter 2. This experiment investigated the nature of perception, in which experimental subjects were asked to identify, on a short and controlled exposure time, a series of playing cards, in which anomalous cards such as a

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[11] Stanislavski had difficulty in communicating his evolving ideas on the System to the actors, who preferred the security of a more psychological approach to Stanislavski's developing Method of Physical Action, which emphasised physical actions as the primary method of entering into a character. (Morgan, J.V., *Stanislavski's Encounter With Shakespeare*, Ann Arbor, 1984, p.96.) Additionally, there were logistical difficulties in realising Craig's designs, which created tension between the collaborators. The production's difficulties culminated in an opening night near-disaster, when Craig's set collapsed.

[12] Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, Moscow, [date of publication unknown], p.400. Stanislavski's 1930 production of *Othello* was also widely considered a failure. (Magarshack, *Stanislavsky: A Life*, London, 1950, pp.379-380.)

[13] Toporkov, *op.cit.*, pp.208-209; Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, London, 1988, p.318.

[14] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.65. Also Kuhn, *ET*, pp.233-237.

red six of spades had been placed. Even on the very shortest exposure times the subjects attempted identification of most or all of the cards, and for the normal playing cards these identifications were almost always correct. The anomalous cards, however, were mis-identified as being of a normal pack, and only after repeated and increased exposure were subjects able to correctly identify the anomalous cards. In the previous chapter we drew upon these results to illustrate the point made by Thomas Kuhn that paradigms are prior to perception; that is, our perceptions are controlled by the matrix of exemplars, laws and applications shared by a community.[15] Bruner and Postman also stress that perception of a particular stimulus is affected by experience (or paradigmatic features) at an even more fundamental level:

> Given a stimulus input of certain characteristics, directive processes in the organism operate to organize the perceptual field in such a way as to maximize percepts relevant to current needs and expectations and to minimize percepts inimical to such needs and expectations.[16]

Put simply, our paradigmatic expectations inform us on what we are most likely to perceive, and as a result we are more likely to receive those stimuli than any others. This is clearly indicated by Bruner and Postman's experiment, where even after the longest exposure time used, only 89.7% of the anomalous cards were recognised. Additionally, 96% of the experimental subjects at some point exhibited a "perceptual denial" of the anomalous nature of the fake cards, instead mis-identifying, for example, a red six of spades as either a normal six of spades or six of hearts.[17] Thomas Kuhn believes that scientific anomalies are treated in a similar fashion:

> In science, as in the playing card experiment, novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation.[18]

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[15] *ibid.*, pp.62-63; Bruner & Postman, *op.cit.*, pp.210-212; 206.

[16] Bruner & Postman, *op.cit.*, p.20

[17] *ibid.*, pp.210f, 213, 215.

[18] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.64. The recognition of the paradigmatic nature of perception is reinforced by R.L. Gregory, who links the workings of visual perceptual apparatus with language use; Gregory, Richard L., *Eye and Brain: the Psychology of Seeing*, 5th ed., Oxford, 1998, p.5; also pp.150-151, 161-162, 151-159; Vernon, M.D., *The Psychology of Perception*, 2nd ed., London, 1974, pp.14-15.

3.2 The Nature of Anomalies

The resistance towards anomalies exhibited in scientists is due in no large measure to the nature of the paradigm itself and its implied function. The procedure of Normal Science is intended to better articulate an 'hypothesis of reality' which is derived from observational data, and any anomaly discovered is potentially an attack upon the validity of the hypothesis.[19] In order to protect the paradigm from any such attack, anomalies are generally subjected to protracted and thorough investigation, with the intention of finding an explanation for the anomalous data that is wholly paradigm-consistent. Figure 3.1 depicts a pattern of enquiry that may be found in all paradigmatic researches. At the recognition of an anomaly, researchers (or practitioners) attempt to formulate a solution to the anomaly. If this formulation is successful, the paradigm's dominance is strengthened, until the time when – inevitably – Normal Science research uncovers another anomaly that must be resolved.

> There are always some discrepancies. Even the most stubborn ones usually respond at last to normal practice. Very often scientists are willing to wait, particularly if there are many problems available in other parts of the field.[20]

As Kuhn notes, success is the most anticipated outcome by scientists, and the paradigm's inherent resistance to questioning can lead to anomalies being held in abeyance even, if necessary, for decades if there are more tractable problems that also need to be resolved.[21] Not all experimenters, however, find success through their researches. Indeed, Figure 3.1 also depicts the pattern created when scientists fail to reconcile an anomaly within the boundaries of the dominant paradigm, leading to a crisis in confidence in the paradigm. Upon the failure of one attempt at resolution, the anomaly is likely to come under increasing scrutiny – though as we have seen, this may take some time to materialise – an increasing number of attempts to reconcile it with the paradigm. Sometimes, as in the case of Stanislavski and his production of *Tartuffe*, this process is eventually

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[19] As discussed previously, the search for this data is also paradigm determined.

[20] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.81.

[21] Kuhn cites the example of one of Newton's predictions, which waited for sixty years to be confirmed by other scientists. Kuhn, *SSR*, p.81.

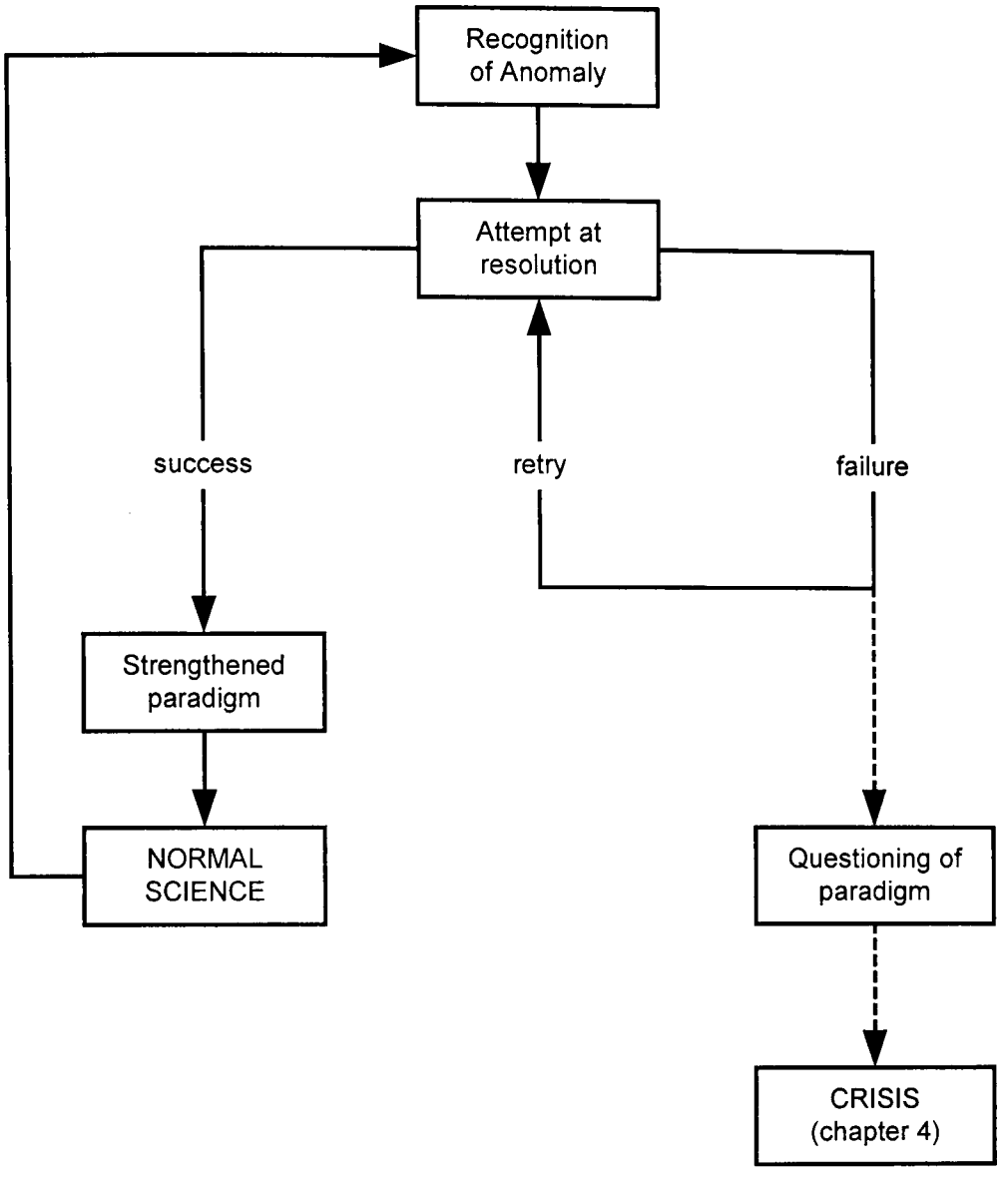

Figure 3.1 Progress of Anomalies

successful. However, on occasions it is not, and the resultant questioning of the paradigm leads to the adoption of novel or non-paradigmatic prospective solutions, a situation which Kuhn terms 'Crisis'. The particular conditions that characterise Crisis are discussed in Chapter 4. In the remainder of this chapter, we shall examine an anomaly in the West End theatre and early abortive attempts to resolve it, before seeing in the next chapter how this anomaly is at the centre of the Crisis that characterises British theatre in the mid- to late-1950s.

3.3 The West End Anomaly

> As a norm, naturalistic conventions are in practice invisible. Yet indeed Naturalism is no less "conventional" than any other form of theatre. However close to everyday conversation it may sound, "the straightforward, plain language spoken in real life" is highly structured in any dramatic dialogue. The more closely a stage

> setting replicates a real place, the more it becomes a fake – and the further it moves away from the actual nature of theatrical performance.[22]

It was noted in the previous chapter that as an example of a theatrical paradigm, the West End paradigm was notably site-specific. Aside from the obvious general urban location implied in its title, this paradigm was marked by the degree to which the primary exponent of the paradigm, Tennents and the Prince Littler Consolidated Trust, accumulated theatre buildings and used them to perform specific paradigm-reinforcing functions. The Lyric Hammersmith, for example, was used as a pre-West End tryout base for Tennents productions that were by untried authors or were of dubious artistic or commercial merit. A similar site-specific nature may be discerned in the function of the small independent theatres that were considered the centres of rebellion against the dominant paradigmatic forms – in Marshall's phrase, the "other theatre," and in the terms of this chapter, 'anomalous theatre'. In the 1930s, for example, the Westminster theatre housed first the Group Theatre, who championed dramatic poetry performed without scenery or props, and later in the decade the London Mask Theatre, formed by J.B. Priestley and Ronald Jeans and responsible for three notable Priestley premieres.[23] Similarly, after World War II the Mercury Theatre was associated with verse drama, while the Arts was noted for its productions of foreign plays as well as its promotion of new playwrights such as Ustinov and Fry.[24] Always small, financially disadvantaged and of fleeting existence, such theatres as these are subject to somewhat contradictory critical assessment. On the one hand these theatres may be considered as fighting an unequal battle against the stagnating or normalising influence of the West End paradigm, which is usually personified by critics in the "timidity of the theatrical manager and the tyranny of the Censor, who between them were reducing the English theatre to a dead level of mediocrity."[25] Such theatres as the Arts, the Mercury, the Boltons and the Unity were considered to have provided havens of

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[22] Innes, C., 'Introduction' in Innes, C., ed., *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre*, p.16.

[23] Marshall, *The Other Theatre*, p.211.

[24] *ibid.*, p.213; Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre*, pp.9-10; Findlater, *The Unholy Trade*, p.52.

[25] Marshall, *op.cit.*, p.13.

experimentation in opposition to the perceived monotony of the West End form of English naturalism. Accompanying, however, this placement of small independent theatres in opposition to the dominant paradigm is the recognition that these very theatres were responsible for the discovery of writing, acting and directing talent that enabled the continuation and strengthening of the dominant paradigm. Indeed, this is viewed by critics of the period as being a matter of some pride; after noting that the talents of Michael Hordern, Peter Brook, Paul Scofield and Donald Sinden were all discovered in small theatres, Elsom states

> If our fringe theatre nowadays can produce such a crop from such seeds, they will not have struggled in vain.[26]

The apparent duality in the function of the 'other theatre' between opposition and essential paradigmatic support points us towards a factor of the production and solution of anomalies in theatrical paradigms that is possibly unique. In scientific paradigms, Kuhn states that the scientist is unwilling, indeed, unable, to look beyond the paradigm in which he/she works for solutions to anomalies:

> Once a first paradigm through which to view nature has been found, there is no such thing as research in the absence of any paradigm. To reject one paradigm without simulataneously substituting another is to reject science itself. That act reflects not on the paradigm but on the man.[27]

The anomalous/'other' theatre practitioner, by contrast, seems to use conditions of the dominant paradigm as a threat of artistic stasis from which they must escape; many theatre practitioners are, in short, predisposed to distrust the dominant and actively seek out the anomalous. The efforts of these practitioners are then watched by the exponents of the dominant paradigm, in the hope of discovering new talents, forms, content or techniques that may be subsumed into the dominant paradigm.

This pattern of response is clearly visible in the West End paradigm. From the very inception of naturalistic theatre, it was recognised that there was a

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[26] Elsom, *op.cit.*, p.10; also Marshall, *op.cit.*, p.13f; Findlater, *op.cit.*, p.50.

[27] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.79.

tension inherent in the blend of Scribean artifice and naturalistic sociological and presentational imperatives.

> If you set out to imitate life, it is almost impossible to obey the Unities. Life does not fall easily into the syllogistic structures, helping to preserve the Unity of Action ... The compromise between naturalism and the well-made play was thus illogical and provided self-contradictions at almost every technical level...[28]

As noted last chapter, the typical response of the West End playwright to this conflict was to downplay the sociological element of naturalism as seen in European works, concentrating not on characterisations and motivations, but rather on well-made storylines that provided a neatly-packaged approximation of real life, presented onstage using a superficially naturalistic approach to setting. The tensions between artifice and naturalism, however, were still so apparent that by 1952 Findlater could write in despair:

> How much is missing from the naturalism of the early twentieth century English drama ... With its rejection of "artificial aids", its spurious sociology, and its absurd ideal of complete illusion, it excluded a whole dimension of theatrical expression. It insisted on the externals, on what could be seen and heard in one stratum of English social life – while the trend of the new psychology, reflected in other arts, was a turning of the attention inwards, the examination of the private world and its public illustration.[29]

Particularly in the 1920s and 1930s this sense of the thinness of the 'human' content of English naturalism was intimately connected to the psychological after-effects of World War I. In the wake of the unprecedented brutality and loss of life that the British population had experienced, much of the public seemed to experience a desire for some kind of spiritual comfort and explanation for the trauma they had undergone. While such writers as Christie catered to that section of the population who wished to shelter from their recent pasts in the puzzle mysteries of 'Mayhem Parva', other writers heeded the call from commentators for works which dealt with life's universals:

> The drama then must be concerned again with the relation of man not only to society, but also to himself, to God, to Time,

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[28] Elsom, *op.cit.*, pp.40-41.

[29] Findlater, *op.cit.*, p.124.

> History, Destiny, or what you will – to find and express a pattern in the bloody anarchy of contemporary life and death.[30]

J.B. Priestley and T.S. Eliot were two of the more prominent writers who took up the challenge of dramatising the spiritual aspect of (English) life, attempting the development of new dramatic forms in which to do so. As will be seen in the next section, however, both writers were to some extent hamstrung by their inability to trust in their audience's ability to accept anomalous thematic material *and* structural forms tied together in wholly experimental works, instead attempting to meld some aspects of West End theatre into their thematic and structural innovations. The ultimate result of their acceptance of at least some West End paradigmatic criteria was the subsuming of their dramatic talent into the heart of the 'Normal' British theatre of the period.

3.3.1 J.B. Priestley

J.B. Priestley was a prolific playwright, his output encompassing 37 original plays, an opera libretto and 2 stage adaptations of novels, one of them his own bestseller *The Good Companions*. Of these only a fraction are regularly performed, in print or easily obtainable, thus making an accurate assessment of his stagecraft and significance in British theatre somewhat complicated. It is clear, however, from the plays still available and from Priestley's other writings on theatre that he was an eager experimentalist both in form and content; indeed, he considered such conceptual exploration a duty required of all writers.[31] Across Priestley's better-known works there is a clear pattern of innovation of both form and content, rising in a crescendo though the 'time plays' and reaching its highest point in *Johnson over Jordan* (1939). This increase in experimentation, noted by Priestley himself, involved the exploration of new thematic material through the introduction of non-naturalistic staging techniques. However, Priestley's willingness to move away from West End subjects and staging techniques seems to have been materially affected both by World War 2 and by the

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[30] *ibid.*, p.126.

[31] Lloyd Evans, G., *J.B. Priestley the Dramatist*, London, 1964, p.9.

failure of *Johnson*, which was not only Priestley's most non-naturalistic work, but the one to which he was most attached.[32] His plays after 1945 demonstrate a decrease in experimentation and significantly, after the poor response to the Old Vic production of *An Inspector Calls*, Priestley's next play *The Linden Tree* is a highly praised piece of conventional West End naturalism. This section examines in more detail this pattern of Priestley's innovativeness, relating his choice of subject matter to his own WW1 experiences, and ending with a discussion of the reasons why even Priestley's most experimental works written prior to WW2 are at best only partial successes at addressing the artifice/realism anomaly of West End theatre.

Perhaps as a result of a more general interest in time following the worldwide publicity of Einstein's theories before WW1, after the War the philosophy of time became an extremely fashionable means for the general populace to come to terms with the deaths of their loved ones. Priestley, who according to his friends had been greatly changed by his war experiences, was immediately attracted to two of these theories in particular.[33] J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* and P.D. Ouspensky's *The New Model of the Universe* were important influences for Priestley's drama, especially the 'time plays' of 1936/7. Dunne used complex mathematics to model experiments based on individuals' dream experiences, so as to demonstrate the complicated structure both of time and an individual's experience of it. Priestley took Dunne to suggest, in essence, that linear time is illusory: past, present and future can all be experienced simultaneously, generally as some sort of dream state, and that the conscious mind consists of an infinite row of Observers. These are connected to an infinite number of dimensions. At death a new Observer is 'unpeeled' carrying the sum of knowledge and experience of all previous Observers, conferring a variety of immortality upon the sum of Observers, which Dunne describes as representing the real Ego.[34] Ouspensky's work is somewhat simpler in conception. Suggesting that

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[32] He considered it his best writing for the stage. Priestley, J.B., *Johnson Over Jordan*, p.129f; Cook, J., *Priestley*, London, 1988, p.175.

[33] Cook, *op.cit.*, p.49.

[34] Lloyd Evans, *op.cit.*, pp.55-56; Cook, *op.cit.*, pp.117-118.

time is circular, Ouspensky believes that theoretically every person may repeat the events of their lives an infinite number of times. If, however, an individual enters a period of intellectual or spiritual growth – or regression – Ouspensky's spiral theory posits that they may 'swing out' of their old circle into a new existence, whether for good or ill.[35] Finally, Ouspensky suggests that certain individuals may become conscious of previous tracks travelled in the spiral, again via dream states, and may use the knowledge to interfere in cycles to help others avoid dangers or crises.[36]

The attraction of these theories to a war-devastated populace lies in their rejection of a linear conception of time: the past, and those in it, need not be seen as unreachable or even unchangeable:

> ... emotionally, they imply an immortality without the necessity of a deity, and therefore without the need for a 'faith' combined with religious practice and doctrine. They provide therefore, for the romantic sceptic, the comfort of an eternal life with an apparent scientific justification.[37]

Ouspensky's spiral theory even attributes a moral structure to the universe, giving incentive for intellectual improvement through the threat of an apparently scientifically justified hell. Though Priestley could see logical flaws in both theories, he recognised the emotional power implicit in them, and used them as launching pads for two of his most famous works, *Time and the Conways* and *I Have Been Here Before*. Priestley's challenge was to find a suitable dramatic structure for the complexities of each theory. In both cases he settles on a modified realism:

> It is dangerous to try and advance on all fronts at once. (It is dangerous in this country to try and advance on any front.) When I had made use of unfamiliar material ... I had stuck to a fairly conventional dramatic method.[38]

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[35] "Dr Görtler: Some people, steadily developing, will exhaust the possibilities of their circles of time and will finally swing out of them into new existences. Others – the criminals, madmen, suicides – live their lives in ever darkening circles of their time. Fatality begins to haunt them." (Priestley, J.B., *I Have Been Here Before* in *Time and the Conways and Other Plays*, London, 1969, p.128.)

[36] Lloyd Evans, *op.cit.*, p.57; Brome, V., *J.B. Priestley*, London, 1988, p.177.

[37] Lloyd Evans, *op.cit.*, p.57.

[38] Priestley, J.B., *Johnson Over Jordan*, p.124.

In *Time and the Conways* Priestley apparently attempts to incorporate Dunne's time theory into the dramatic structure through setting the first act in 1919, in the second act jumping forward in time to 1937 (the present day for the play's initial audiences), before returning to the same evening in 1919 for the concluding act of the play. Priestley frames the second act as being Kay's premonition of the future, accessed through a dream state; this device allows Priestley to load the third act with irony as the audience witnesses the hopes and future expectations of the characters yet knows that none of them will be fulfilled. Priestley's biographer Brome has suggested that the 'time-jump' structure of the play particularly relates to Dunne's observer theory:

> The audience has been granted the vision which Dunne gave to Observer Two and has, in fact, become Observer Two endowed with omniscience.[39]

If this is so, Priestley cannot be considered to be successful. The audience cannot be Observer Two, for their experience of the 1937 future is not dreamlike, this act being as naturalistically presented as the 1919 acts. The audience of this play are indeed omniscient, but this state is not materially different to that of any audience of Zola-esque naturalism. The time-jump technique of itself is unable to take the structural weight of Priestley's metaphysical vision.[40]

I Have Been Here Before, which is predominantly based on Ouspenskian theory, is more subtle in its transformation of West End dramatic structure. Priestley borrows elements of the Christie-style mystery play: his mysterious Stranger is Dr Görtler, who arrives at the Inn on Grindle Moor to intervene in the lives of the Ormunds and Oliver Farrant. The basic plotline, in which Farrant and Janet Ormund at first succumb to an almost preternatural attraction between them and are ultimately dissuaded from running away together, is quite straightforward. The factor that takes the play beyond the ordinary bounds of West End drama is the manner in which Priestley infuses an air of predestination into the fabric of the plot. This is, to a large degree, Görtler's function in the play's first two acts. His peculiar behaviour

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[39] Brome, *op.cit.*, p.204.

[40] Innes, C., *Modern British Drama 1890-1990*, p.374.

when he first arrives, asking after the landlord's guests and suggesting that he may have arrived in the wrong year, is compounded by his frequent rhetorical remarks and non-sequiturs:

> Sam: ... I'd ask for naught better – if I had my time over again.
> Dr Görtler [*interested*]: Do you often say that?
> Sam: Say what?
> Dr Görtler [*slowly*]: If you had your time over again.[41]

The environment of the inn in some respects moves beyond the bounds of realistic backdrop to become a contributor to the action of the play, but in a different way to that of naturalism. The reactions of the other Inn guests, for example, to each other and their environment add to the sense of non-naturalistic predestination: Janet feels she has seen the Inn, Farrant and Görtler before, while Ormund also exhibits some recognition of Farrant. Similarly, the chimes of the Inn's clock are used to underline significant moments as well as the overall sense of the sinister and the implication that time is running out.[42] Lloyd Evans, however, considers Priestley's most significant – though subtle – departure from naturalistic technique to be his connection of dialogue and stage directions in some scenes of the play into an approximation of a fusion of poetry and dramatic action. Quoting first without stage directions, and then as written, the scene between Görtler and Janet in Act One, in which he carefully presses her into a closer consideration of her feelings of déjà vu, Lloyd Evans suggests that in his attempt to dramatise the otherness of Janet's experience of the inn, Priestley uses the stage directions as "a direct projection from a language which is not, in itself, capable of holding the full meaning."[43] Just as we shall see in Pinter's work in Chapter 6, Priestley goes beyond simply providing advice to actors on technicalities of delivery and stage blocking, using them as a means of augmenting the emotional and metaphysical force of the scene. The pauses, sudden request for Janet to speed up her speech, and even Görtler's movement towards her at one point in the scene, all allow Priestley to "break away from the flavourless patter of modern realistic English dialogue" by

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[41] Priestley, *I Have Been Here Before*, p.96.

[42] Priestley, *I Have Been Here Before*, pp.98, 103, 105, 132-133; Lloyd Evans, *op.cit.*, p.109.

[43] Lloyd Evans, *op.cit.*, p.113; Priestley, *I Have Been Here Before*, pp.105-106.

heightening speech without having either to resort to explicit verse forms and rhythms, or find an entirely non-naturalistic form of dialogue that would sit uneasily with the West End plot and setting.[44]

It is with *Johnson over Jordan* that Priestley's efforts at experiment both in form and content reach their peak; nowhere else does Priestley more completely attempt to marry his subject matter to his method of presentation.[45] Frequently described as expressionistic for its use of music and masks, *Johnson* was inspired by Priestley's reading of the dream-like after-death state that is a part of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. This is transferred, in a Westernised form, into the play: Johnson enters an hallucinatory state in which he encounters situations and people either directly derived from, or inspired by, his own memories. [46] Each Act of *Johnson* was intended to display the reconciliation of the lead character Johnson with particular aspects of his life as a means of preparing him for death/rebirth: anxieties and responsibilities in the nightmarish office of Act 1;[47] "sensual, bestial and murderous tendencies" in Act 2; while in Act 3 Johnson "would discover his best self and those things that had quickened his mind and touched his heart." In this Act especially Priestley attempted the telescoping of time that so often occurs in dreams, as demonstrated by

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[44] Priestley, J.B., *The Art of the Dramatist*, London, 1957, pp.130-131; Lloyd Evans, *op.cit.*,p.113.

[45] *Ever Since Paradise* was written also at this time, although not performed until 1947, and is notable for its playfulness around the notion of the audience as unseen spectators. At first glance it is a revue-style treatment of a fairly conventional story of 'love gone wrong'. Accompanied by two pianists, narrators William and Helen present and comment upon the slide of Paul and Rosemary's marriage into unhappiness and divorce. The Paul and Rosemary scenes are presented in an inner proscenium with its own curtain. The inventive aspect of this staging is the degree to which the narrators are actually participants in the drama, not only taking roles as friends or even relations of Paul and Rosemary, but interrupting, freezing the action, and even initiating repeats of certain events so as to make points to the audience – and each other – about the misunderstandings that develop between couples. (e.g. Priestley, J.B., *Ever Since Paradise* in *When We Are Married and Other Plays*, Harmondsworth, 1969, pp.198-201) In Act 2 even Paul and Rosemary step out of their inner proscenium and interact with the narrators and the musicians, thus destroying any lingering pretence at naturalistic objectivity that the audience may have held. (Priestley, *Ever Since Paradise*, pp.203ff.) An enjoyable piece, it demonstrates Priestley's willingness to attempt to write in non-West End theatrical structures.

[46] Priestley, *Johnson over Jordan*, pp.120-121.

[47] This part of the play reminds me of the dystopian view of bureaucracy in Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil*.

Johnson's meetings with important figures from his past, such as his long-dead brother.

> This method, if successfully pursued, should bring what we see and hear on the stage very close to our own interior and secret life, to those dreams of ours so strange and moving, oddly significant, that they can make the day of waking life that follows them often seem flat and colourless.[48]

Unfortunately, the combination of the immediate socio-political concerns arising from WW2 and the box office failure of both *Johnson* and the revue-style piece *Ever Since Paradise* seems to signal the end of Priestley's willingness to play so overtly with structure and unconventional metaphysical content in his work. *An Inspector Calls* (1947) forsakes the music and ballet of *Johnson* for another modification of West End dramatic structure. In the play Priestley returns to the thriller structure, with Inspector Goole as the mysterious Stranger who comes to interrogate the Birling family over the suicide of a young woman with whom everyone in the family had dealings. Priestley's most subtle transformation of the thriller structure lies in the Inspector's function in visiting the Birlings. Unlike the police officer/detective of an ordinary mystery, Goole's aim is not to interview each character in turn, testing the veracity of their stories and determining whether or not they are to be a suspect in the girl's death. Rather, the Inspector wishes to impute blame to *all* the Birling family. Priestley's message in this play, that we are all socially responsible for the well-being of each other, is in some ways a return to the more sociological roots of continental naturalism, but is conveyed in terms that are distinctly non-naturalistic. For example, near the end of the play Priestley undercuts the thriller structure he has been using, introducing the plot twist that Goole was not a real inspector and that no woman has died. While most of the family feel that they have been duped needlessly, the two younger Birlings recognise that the existence of the corpse and the inspector are in a sense irrelevant: they feel that they have treated other human beings without respect, and understand that this in its own way is a crime against humanity itself. The final twist, in which a telephone call announces the imminent arrival of a real inspector to investigate a real suicide, is not only

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[48] Priestley, *Johnson over Jordan*, p.126.

a highly effective dramatic moment in the theatre, but is the most subtle introduction of Dunne/Ouspensky time theory that Priestley attempted. Goole was some form of premonition, an agent who wished to interrupt the time circle of the Birlings prior to a crisis and assist them to a higher level of understanding. The fundamentally socio-political theme of the play is thus couched in dramatic structures that are distinctly non-naturalistic in implication. It is, then, perhaps unfortunate that for the London premiere production the play was produced using a naturalistic set that would have done little to support the transformational structures of the plot. Once again, Priestley's attempts at experimentation met with box office failure.[49] His next play *The Linden Tree* (1947) was another message regarding social responsibility, but this time couched in purely naturalistic terms. The play was a success.

The failure of Priestley's experiments with form and content resulted in part from pure economics. Financing a number of his own productions, Priestley well understood that audience taste was not something to be totally ignored, and that if an audience did not take kindly to the product presented to them, there was little that could be done to save it from closure, however critically lauded or theatrically significant the work may be. This is most noticeable in connection with *Johnson over Jordan*, which Priestley attempted to save by injecting private finances and even moving it to a different theatre. *Johnson* was a peculiarly expensive production, using music specially commissioned from Benjamin Britten, large sets, innovative lighting, and a troupe of dancers and musicians in addition to an abnormally large cast of actors. In a purely commercial theatre for such a production to succeed large box office takings were required at every performance, and these were not

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[49] Innes, *op.cit.*, p.374. It would be an interesting research project to examine the various stagings of this play, comparing its Moscow and Old Vic premieres with the recent Stephen Daldry production of the play. In spite of its lengthy box office success (so great that when, during its Australiasian tour, the scenery was trapped by floods in the middle of Australia, the Australian Air Force was called in at a cost of $A100,000 to air-lift the set to Sydney), I personally believe the staging does the play little justice. It creates a non-naturalistic staging, but makes the Birling's residence a doll's house in the middle of a grey and wet slum area peopled by urchins. Goole remains on the street throughout, calling up to the family on their balcony. With this idiosyncratic setting Daldry not only makes the lengthy exchanges between Goole and the Birlings little more than static shouting matches, but actually works against Priestley's careful writing of his theme of social significance by over-emphasising it.

forthcoming.[50] Having failed to win audiences with such flamboyant staging, it was hardly surprising that Priestley would revert to normal West End production demands.[51]

Priestley's primary difficulty, however, lay in his inability to find a suitable dramatic means of conveying his metaphysical vision. In the earlier 'time plays' the plot and characters too often feel constricted by the demands of the theory: potentially interesting character dilemmas such as Ormund's struggle against suicide in *I Have Been Here Before* are sacrificed to the exigencies of concluding the plot in accordance with Ouspenskian theory; the positioning of Görtler's explanation of the finer points of the theory in Act 3, while necessary in order to account for his presence, acts as a check to the onward momentum of the plot perilously near to its conclusion, and removes much of the sense of mystery and predestination that has been so carefully fostered in the rest of the play.[52] Ultimately, however, it was finding a stage language suitable for his aims that defeated Priestley. Recognising correctly that ordinary West End language was too flat and superficial for his purposes, the fusion of dialogue and stage directions in some scenes of *I Have Been Here Before* goes some way to attaining the emotional/spiritual depth that Priestley required. In the main, however, his language use is too tied to West End dramatic dialogue patterns to deal adequately with the metaphysical problems he wished to examine. *Johnson*, for example, is too hampered by the littleness, the ordinariness both of the main character and his language use to truly explore the fundamentals of life and death:

> It fails because, yet again, Priestley seems unable to trust himself and his audience with too much or too rich a diet of the non-naturalistic; the theme, the technique employed, cry out for a wholehearted plunge into symbolic drama ... Like the play itself, [Johnson] is neither one thing nor the other ... He remains relatively untouched by everything – he is like a man in a funfair

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[50] Priestley, *Johnson over Jordan*, p.137.

[51] "The very rumour of our colossal preparations, which necessitated the co-operation of a great many specialists, months of work, and the spending of far, far too much money, was enough to prejudice in advance some stalwarts of austere naturalism, who had at one time considered me a man after their own heart, another ascetic of the playhouse." (*ibid.*, p.129)

[52] Priestley, *I Have Been Here Before*, pp.144-148; Lloyd Evans, *op.cit.*, pp.118-119; Innes, *op.cit.*, p.371.

> who knows a good tea awaits him at home so long as he has patience.[53]

Ultimately, Priestley either could not trust his audience to accept the non-naturalistic drama he wished to write, or was unable to realise it on the page. In either case, his talent was ultimately drawn back towards the West End theatre, though without the creative impetus of the philosophies of time it seems he had little of dramatic importance to say, and his works after 1947 for the most part now languish in obscurity.

3.3.2 T.S. Eliot

> Eliot's progress as a playwright seems to be a movement away from experiment. His most modern-looking piece, a jazz melodrama, was published in 1926; his last play, produced in 1958, looks more like a piece of staid neo-Ibsenism... Eliot did jokingly say himself about some improvement suggested for *The Cocktail Party* that every step seemed to take him nearer to Lonsdale.[54]

Katharine Worth's comment above is an example of a common critical summing-up of Eliot's playwriting career. Though Worth is somewhat apologetic for this view and attempts to detail the nascent experimentalism of even Eliot's later and more conservative works, the fact remains that Eliot's first major play *Murder in the Cathedral* is filled with non-naturalistic experimentation that gradually decreases in significance in all his later works. This retreat to West End dramatic structures is directly attributable to Eliot's desire to reach a wider audience with his broadly Christian moral message. This section outlines briefly the connection between Eliot's experimentation in verse drama and his desire to promote Christian value structures to (possibly) unchurched theatre audiences[55], and

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[53] Lloyd Evans, *op.cit.*, p.134. For an example of dialogue: Priestley, *Johnson over Jordan*, p.83:

> Johnson: Why, Jim, you were one of my great heroes. Good Lord! – I remember my father taking me to the Lancashire match for a birthday treat ... But what are *you* doing here?
> Porter (*smiling*): Why, sir, meeting you. (*Confidentially*) It's a rum place, this, you'll see.

[54] Worth, K., *Revolutions in Modern English Drama*, p.55. Also Findlater, *Unholy Trade*, p.145.

[55] I use the word 'possibly' because, although Britain at this time was ostensibly a Christian nation, many of the population would have admitted to little real religious convictions.

the extent to which this desire ultimately outweighed and defeated his wishes to find a new form of verse drama for the modern age.

Before beginning to write seriously for the stage, T.S. Eliot was convinced that verse drama was the form most suitable for the dramatisation of the problems of modern humanity:

> People have tended to think of verse as a restriction upon drama. They think that the emotional range, and the realistic truth, of drama is limited and circumscribed by verse ... But is not every dramatic representation artificial? And are we not merely deceiving ourselves with appearances, instead of insisting on fundamentals? ...I say that ... if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse...[56]

When Eliot was eventually commissioned to write for the stage, part of his intention was to find a modern verse form that would be capable of conveying his Christian-based dramatic content. Though he had attempted to write a dramatic work before his baptism into the Church of England in 1927 (*Sweeney Agonistes*, written in 1926 but not performed until 1935 by the Group Theatre), it was his Christian faith that both practically and philosophically impelled his dramatic writing.[57] *The Rock*, a pageant play, and *Murder in the Cathedral* were both specially commissioned by Christian organisations for predominantly Christian audiences. For the latter play in particular, the identity of the potential audience seems to have helped Eliot to feel free to experiment with structure and verse forms, especially as the story of Becket's martyrdom would have been very familiar to the Canterbury Cathedral festival audience. [58] The basic structure of the play is moulded on Greek tragedy, with the dialogues between Becket and the Tempters, Knights and Priests taking place in between Choral odes. Eliot layers over this structure a mirroring of the two main Parts, the First being dominated by the tempting of Becket, and the Second by the tempting of the

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[56] Eliot, T.S., 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry' in Hinchcliffe, A., ed., *T.S. Eliot: Plays*, Basingstoke, 1995, pp.21-2.

[57] Hinchcliffe, A., 'Introduction' in *T.S. Eliot: Plays*, p.11.

[58] "...my play was to be produced for a rather special kind of audience – an audience of those serious people who go to 'festivals' and expect to have to put up with poetry ... And finally it was a religious play, and people who go deliberately to a religious play at a religious festival expect to be patiently bored and to satisfy themselves with the feeling that they have done something meritorious. So the path was made easy." (Eliot, T.S., *Poetry and Drama*, London, 1951, pp.22-23.)

audience by the Knights.[59] In keeping with the original cathedral setting of the play, Eliot borrows some elements of liturgy to include in the dialogue, as for example in the very last lines of the play, which are a paraphrase of the Kyrie Eleison.[60] The two main sections of the work are separated by a sermon, which not only echoes its church setting but is the first instance of the audience of the play being taken out of a state of 'fourth wall' objectivity and placed into the action in the character of Becket's congregation. The audience are addressed directly again after Becket's murder by the four Knights, whose everyday language prose speeches not only have a blackly comic effect after the high drama of the violence that the Knights wish to justify, but also highlights linguistically the extent to which their actions have intruded into the ritual of Becket's world.[61] Eliot's willingness to move to and from prose in the play is an indication of the extent to which he moulds verse metres and speech rhythms to each character and specific dramatic function in the play. Most specifically, Eliot borrows metres and rhythms from both medieval mystery plays such as *Everyman* and from jazz music, as he did previously in *Sweeney Agonistes*.[62]

Murder in the Cathedral was an unprecedented commercial success: by a combination of serendipity and shrewd management the play not only ran for an initial seven months at the Mercury Theatre, but toured to a number of cities across Britain and eventually had runs both in the West End at the Duchess Theatre and at the Old Vic.[63] The overwhelming reception to this play seems to have had two major effects on Eliot's later drama. The first effect was for Eliot to re-examine the verse structures he had employed in the play. He– perhaps incorrectly – considered that although he had avoided the potential danger of writing in outdated and inflexible mock-Shakespearian blank verse, he had not found a metre or idiom that he felt

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[59] Innes, *Modern British Drama 1890-1990*, p.391.

[60] Fergusson, F., 'Ritual Form of Ancient Tragedy' in Hinchcliffe, *op.cit.*, pp.106-107; Eliot, T.S., *Murder in the Cathedral*, London, 1968, p.94.

[61] Lloyd Evans, G., 'The Dramatist in Search of a Language' in Hinchcliffe, *op.cit.*, pp.113-114.

[62] Innes, *op.cit.*, pp.390, 392.

[63] Browne, E.M., *The Making of T.S. Eliot's Plays*, Cambridge, 1970, pp.67-70.

could become a model for all modern verse drama.[64] Secondly, Eliot realised that by writing specifically for church groups and festivals he was in essence 'preaching to the converted', and that by rejecting overtly Christian topics in favour of Christianised morality tales placed in modern settings he could reach a larger audience and perhaps effect a spiritual transformation in the population at large.[65] Accordingly, all of Eliot's plays after this date attempt to transform or revitalise West End dramatic structures, using them to demonstrate the illusory nature of social existence when compared to questions of spirituality or the soul. *The Family Reunion*, for example, plays upon the conventions both of the mystery story and the country house drama when Harry Monchensey comes home to Wishwood and announces that he killed his wife while they were at sea.[66] Eliot attempts to integrate the Chorus further into the play by giving them a dual existence as Harry's aunts and uncles, a solution that Eliot later recognised was unsatisfactory, as it required too great a transition of mood and speech for the actors involved. The play also retains a Greek influence both in the use of the Orestes story as the basis for the plot and the retention of the Eumenides from that myth as beings that chase Harry, not as he supposes to accuse or torment him, but ultimately to encourage the expiation of his guilt.[67]

The Family Reunion begins to exhibit the difficulties and retreats into naturalism that Eliot experiences in all his plays after *Murder in the Cathedral*. These fit into two main areas, a failure of thematic content and a failure of versification and dramatic structure. The fundamental problem

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[64] Eliot, *Poetry and Drama*, p.24; Lloyd Evans in Hinchcliffe, *op.cit.*, p.115.

[65] Eliot in Browne, *op.cit.*, p.312:

> In the theatre, I feel that one wants a Christian mentality to permeate the theatre, to affect it and to influence audiences who might be obdurate to plays of directly Christian appeal.

Also Innes, *Modern British Drama 1890-1990*, p.393. Also Eliot, *Poetry and Drama*, p.27:

> What we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre; not to transport the audience into some imaginary world totally unlike its own, an unreal world in which poetry is tolerated ... on the contrary, our own sordid, dreary daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured.

[66] Worth, *op.cit.*, p.61.

[67] Eliot, *Poetry and Drama*, pp.28, 29.

with Eliot's attempt to submerge a Christian ethos into a superficially West End play structure is that, without a specifically Christian context, the guilt suffered by both Harry Monchensey and Lord Claverton of *The Elder Statesman* has no root in reality. Both men perceive that they have committed a crime (sin): Harry confesses to killing his wife, and Claverton to running over an old man in the road. In both plays it transpires, however, that neither man has committed any act for which he may be criminally liable: Monchensey has taken upon himself the guilt of his father, who had intended to kill his wife – Monchensey's mother – but failed; while Claverton knows that the man was later found to have died of natural causes prior to being run over. In Christian terms, the fact that neither man has committed an actual crime is not significant; that either man perceives that their moral conduct has been somehow wanting is sufficient for them to wish to be forgiven for their sins. In dramatic terms, however, in plays which have so little spiritual context that they rarely even mention God, let alone attempt to place the characters' perceived sin into a Christian context, the lack of any actual physical wrongdoing is dramatically ineffective. Innes, for example, considers that "in removing the threat to the characters, this also reduces the motivation for their spiritual conversion."[68] Similarly, in *The Cocktail Party* the death of Celia, deeply significant to the spiritual message of the play, is merely reported to the other characters and audience prior to another cocktail party. Williams considered that in this "Eliot succeeded in displacing the lonely intense experience, which had always been his essential concern, to a reported event: a story to point at." The social surface of the play had overwhelmed its substance.[69]

Eliot's second main failure lies in his inability to achieve a combination of verse form and dramatic structure that could fulfil his own lofty aims for the revitalization of verse drama.[70] By 1949, in fact, Eliot could state when interviewed:

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[68] Innes, *op.cit.*, p.394.

[69] Williams, 'A Theatrical Compromise' in Hinchcliffe, *op.cit.*, p.149.

[70] "I have before my eyes a kind of mirage of the perfection of verse drama, which would be a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order." Eliot, *Poetry and Drama*, p.34.

> I want people to forget that they are listening to poetic play. A present-day audience, which realises that it is listening to a play in verse, cannot be expected to have the right attitude to what I am trying to do.[71]

This seems too fearful of the audience's response to poetry, a timidity that deeply affected Eliot's work. When Eliot was prepared to indulge in the rhythmic patterning and use of devices such as repetition, as in the darkly comic opening to *The Cocktail Party*, Eliot's use of an irregular length line with three stresses and a caesura could be extremely flexible in moving from a tone of ordinary conversation to statements of complex experience. This is exemplified in the following excerpt from *The Family Reunion*:

> Gerald: That reminds me, Amy.
> When are the boys all due to arrive?
> Amy: I do not want the clock to stop in the dark.
> If you want to know why I never leave Wishwood
> That is the reason. I keep Wishwood alive
> To keep the family alive, to keep them together.[72]

Unfortunately, Eliot was all too often unable to trust his own dramatic and poetic technique, manipulating his dialogue so as to offer explanations for complex spiritual passages in naturalistic terms.[73] Overall, Eliot left himself in positions where he had to make compromises; between the sacred and secular, the poetic and the prosaic. Though Eliot's work was still intensely literate and intelligent, in writing in specifically West End structures for a West End audience he ultimately diluted his own dramatic vision.[74]

Though Eliot and Priestley were ultimately unsuccessful in their efforts to investigate new dramatic structures and new dramatic language that would be capable of conveying to an audience thematic material that had not managed to penetrate the apparent superficialities of the West End form, their work did influence other writers. Particularly significant within the confines of this thesis is the influence that Eliot and, to a lesser extent, Priestley, had upon the work of Pinter. Pinter's appreciation of Eliot's poetry is publicly known, and significant work has been written on specific

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[71] Eliot in Findlater, *The Unholy Trade*, p.145.

[72] Eliot, *The Family Reunion*, p.15.

[73] Williams, R., 'The Drawing-Room of Naturalism' in Hinchcliffe, *op.cit.*, pp.134-135.

[74] Findlater, *The Unholy Trade*, p.145.

instances in which Pinter's work may be seen to have congruences with that of Eliot, specifically in areas of language use and the utilisation of names (in *The Elder Statesman*, for example) and objects as points with which to attack other characters.[75] Priestley, as we have seen, anticipated a key feature of Pinter's dramatic technique in his use of stage directions in certain scenes in *I Have Been Here Before*, as well as providing some intriguing plot details from *Mr Kettle and Mrs Moon* for Pinter's *The Birthday Party*.[76] The subsuming of Priestley and Eliot back into the West End dramatic paradigm did not, however, end dissatisfaction and tension arising from the artifice/realism anomaly inherent in the paradigm. Indeed, that tension increased, moving towards a Crisis.

3.4 Continuing Anomaly: the Ionesco/Tynan Debate

The debate that occurred in the pages of *The Observer* in 1958 between Kenneth Tynan and Eugène Ionesco may be seen as the climax of the debate over the nature of West End naturalism. Initially a champion of Ionesco's work and partially responsible for its production in London, Tynan began to retract his support on philosophical grounds. Specifically, Tynan questioned the dramatic and political feasibility of Ionesco's anti-realism. Having stated elsewhere that "the sort of temperament that prefers to steer clear of reality had better steer clear of the drama," Tynan argued that Ionesco's work had taken the theatre along a dramatic blind alley. Unlike the best writers of naturalism, who "express one man's view of the world in terms of people we can all recognise," Tynan believed that Ionesco "was a self-proclaimed advocate of *anti-théâtre*: explicitly anti-realist, and by implication anti-reality as well."[77] Both Tynan's initial charges against Ionesco and Ionesco's reply inform us of the two directions in which investigations of the West End anomaly were destined to take. Tynan in his initial arguments conflates

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[75] Billington, M., *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, London, 1996, pp.21, 40; Worth, *op.cit.*, p.65; Knowles, R., 'Harold Pinter and T.S. Eliot', *The Pinter Review* (forthcoming).

[76] Smith, L., 'Pinter the Player' in Gale, S.H., ed., *Critical Essays on Harold Pinter*. Boston, 1990, pp.235-236.

[77] Tynan in Maschler, T., ed., *Declaration*, Port Washington N.Y., 1972, p.111; Tynan in Ionesco, E., *Notes and Counter-Notes*, trans. D. Watson, London, 1964, pp.91-92.

realism and reality: he assumes the validity of the aims of naturalism, for example, in attempting to portray the actions of characters in their environments, and implies that the main problem with naturalism is the difficulty in achieving an accurate likeness.

> Like all hard disciplines, realism can be easily corrupted. It can sink into sentimentality (N.C. Hunter), half-truth (Terence Rattigan), or mere photographic reproduction of the trivia of human behaviour.[78]

Tynan, in short, calls for a return to the tenets of naturalism, examining elements of society other than the middle-class. As Ionesco realised, however, Tynan's call for a naturalistic revival is based on a false assumption, and one that was used by the advocates of the New Wave to deride any remotely non-naturalistic works. Implicit in Tynan's conflation of 'realism' and 'reality' is the belief that naturalism is the only true and common-sensical method of representing reality. There are two fundamental problems with this belief. The first, pointed out by Innes, is that rules governing what is 'realistic' in interpretation change: the introduction of perspective into painting in the late Middle Ages put an end to the previous practice of expressing hierarchical status through painting more important figures larger in scale no matter what their position in the pictorial frame. Though this method looks 'unnatural' to a modern viewer, to medieval eyes it was 'realistic': it physically represented an actual hierarchy of power and influence; perceptions of reality change. The second point, made by Ionesco in his debate with Tynan, is that Tynan has a very simplistic view of the nature of reality:

> Mr Tynan reproaches me for being so fascinated by the means of expressing 'objective reality' (but it is another question to know what objective reality really is)...[79]

Ionesco argued that his plays attempted to question the very nature of language and perception itself, and that necessarily this entailed the use of anti-realist staging techniques. Battle lines were thus drawn between two different solutions to the artifice/realism problem of naturalism, and in particular West End naturalism: a return to the socio-political heart of

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[78] Tynan in Ionesco, *op.cit.*, p.91.

[79] Ionesco, *op.cit.*, p.105.

naturalism as advocated by Zola, searching for authenticity of emotion and representation; or a repudiation of the very philosophical basis of naturalism, involving a questioning of whether it is possible to represent reality, and even whether there is an 'objective reality' beyond our perceptions at all.[80] In the next chapter we examine the unfolding of Crisis in British theatre, in which the West End theatre is faced with contestatory paradigms. The most famous of these, headed by the Royal Court's New Wave movement, conforms very much to Tynan's solution to the West End anomaly, while Pinter's earliest full-length play *The Birthday Party* begins to move in the anti-naturalistic direction advocated by Ionesco, repudiating the epistemological basis of the naturalistic project:

> I suggest that there are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false ... Because 'reality' is quite a strong firm word we tend to think, or to hope, that the state to which it refers is equally firm, settled and unequivocal. It doesn't seem to be, and in my opinion, it's no worse or better for that.[81]

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[80] Rebellato, *op.cit.*, p.146.

[81] Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre' in *Plays One*, London, 1991, pp.ix-x; Lacey, *British Realist Theatre*, p.142.

4. Kuhnian Crisis in Theatre

4.1 The Nature of Crisis

In the last chapter we examined the functioning of anomalies in the scientific enterprise. When easily solved, anomalies may contribute to the comprehensiveness and stability of a paradigm as an hypothesis of reality. However, as pictured in Figure 3.1, some anomalies repeatedly resist solution within the paradigm. In such a situation as this Kuhn states that the scientific community has recourse to two alternative courses of action. Having exhausted all means of approaching the anomaly, the community may decide to set the problem aside for future scientists, in the hope that with time better instrumentation may be built that will solve the problem. Alternatively, and more interestingly, members of the community may attempt solution of the anomaly using increasingly radical new approaches, eventually resorting to the formulation and testing of novel theories. According to Kuhn, there are three main reasons why scientists feel it necessary to search for solutions outside of the dominant paradigm. Firstly, the anomaly may strike at a fundamental element of the paradigm, calling into question the efficacy of the paradigm's primary exemplars and techniques, and thus compromise the validity of the paradigm's hypothesis of reality at a basic level.[1] The second reason posited by Kuhn is that there may be a pressing social need for change. The Copernican Revolution, for example, arose in part from the need for reform of the calendar. This need was acute, and depended upon accurate observations of astronomical phenomena in order to make the calendrical calculations exact. Unfortunately, astronomers had realised for hundreds of years that their computational techniques, part of the Ptolemaic paradigm of astronomy, were simply inadequate for the task. The Gregorian calendar, first adopted in 1582 and based upon calculations made by Copernicus, was the result of

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[1] e.g. the second half of the 19th century, where a fundamental perceptual and theoretical chasm opened up between Newtonian dynamics and the relatively new field of electromagnetism. Davies, P., *About Time*, London, 1995, pp.48-53; Gribbin, J., *Schrödinger's Kittens*, London, 1995, pp.72-75.

an increasing demand for accuracy of timekeeping in the business sector, as well as considerable political pressure.[2] Finally, Kuhn states that scientists feel the need to move outside the prevailing paradigm more pressing if the anomaly is one of long standing, or if previous research attempting to account for the anomaly only succeeded in uncovering more. Such a state of affairs existed with the proliferation of optical discoveries that led to the emergence of the wave theory of light, and also in the cluster of discoveries that from 1895 "were a constant concomitant of quantum mechanics."[3]

When using non-standard and non-paradigm approaches while researching an anomaly, the scientist begins to behave in a fashion similar to the popular image of how scientists work; that is to say, the scientist begins to conduct experiments and observations without any prior knowledge of what the outcome may be.

> Simultaneously, since no experiment can be conceived without some sort of theory, the scientist in crisis will constantly try to generate speculative theories that, if successful, may disclose the road to a new paradigm and, if unsuccessful, can be surrendered with relative ease.[4]

It is during this period that scientists, according to Kuhn, are more likely to turn to philosophical analysis as a means of approach: that philosophy does not play a role in scientific discourse other than in periods of crisis is tribute to the success of the Normal Science enterprise, as Kuhn explains.

> To the extent that normal research work can be conducted by using the paradigm as a model, rules and assumptions need not be made explicit.[5]

The resort to philosophical analysis at times of Crisis is an attempt to break down the influence of the old paradigm, and to make a case for the general acceptability of a new theory. It is surely no accident that in the 1930s, after the groundwork of quantum mechanics had been laid down, many of the

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[2] Chalmers, *op.cit.*, p.94; Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution*, pp.11-12, 125-126; Duncan, D.E., *The Calendar*, London, 1998, pp.4-5, 244-247.

[3] Kuhn, *SSR*, pp.68-69, 88-89.

[4] *ibid.*, p.87. Kuhn cites Priestley's reaction to the sudden proliferation of new gases as being a prime example of this mode of research.

[5] *ibid.*, p.88.

scientists responsible for the theory wrote books which explained its fundamental points in partly philosophical terms.[6]

Einstein's continued resistance to quantum mechanics, which ended only with his death in 1955, is evidence of the fact that, though a theory arising from a period of Crisis may gain widespread acceptance throughout the scientific community, there will never be total consensus. A minority of scientists may refuse to accept the new paradigm, instead remaining advocates of the previous paradigm, or of rival theories. The English physicist David Bohm, for example, published papers over a career spanning 40 years decrying the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, and presenting his own theory. As with most of these maverick scientists, Bohm was marginalised and largely ignored.[7] Objections to the new paradigm may also extend to the general population, as has occurred with Einsteinian relativity. The writer and physicist Paul Davies states that he and his colleagues routinely receive unsolicited manuscripts from non-scientists who, upset at the violations of common sense perpetrated by the theory, wish to publish their work and prove Einstein was wrong.[8] That this is the case demonstrates, firstly, that a scientific theory, though an hypothesis of reality, need not conform to any dictates of common sense and need not be understandable to the non-scientist; finally, it demonstrates that the general, non-specialist population need play no real part in the adoption of a paradigm.

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[6] Heisenberg's *Physics and Philosophy*; Schrödinger's *Science, Theory and Man*; and Planck's *The Philosophy of Physics* are all examples. Thought experiments are another important means by which scientists may challenge the old paradigm and arrive at an explication of a new theory. Einstein in particular was fond of setting for Niels Bohr experiments that could not be carried out in actuality, and asking Bohr to uncover the flaw in his logic and demonstrate the soundness of quantum theory, which Einstein loathed. Kuhn, *ET*, 240n; Davies and Gribbin, *op.cit.*, pp.68-70; Gribbin, J., *In Search of Schrödinger's Cat*, London, 1993, pp.177-180.

[7] Albert, D.Z., 'Bohm's Alternative to Quantum Mechanics', *Scientific American*, May 1994, 32-39.

[8] Davies, *op.cit.*, p.54.

4.2 Crisis in 1950s British Theatre: Searching for a 'New Wave'

> George [Devine] once wrote, "Have we not seen six million Jews murdered" – I'm quoting from memory – "There have been drastic political and social changes all around us, and the best the theatre can give us is *The Mousetrap*. We want a theatre which will reflect what is happening."[9]

From the rise of verse drama and Priestley's 'time plays' in the 1930s, the West End paradigm had been threatening to enter a period of Crisis. The conflict between the epistemological/sociological need for increasing verisimilitude and the givens of artifice in play structure and staging had become an anomaly of long standing. The factor which ultimately caused this instability of the West End paradigm to tip over into Crisis was the pattern of social change which occurred in Britain, particularly in the mid- to late-1950s. Socially and historically, the period immediately following World War 2 was characterised in Britain by a general political consensus and social stability that was created from the reconciliation of two apparently conflicting strands of public opinion: a belief that the war had provided the government with the opportunity to create a better, more equitable life for all citizens was contrasted with a desire for a return to pre-WW2 (or in Priestley's case, pre-WW1) social and moral values, especially concerning class and the family.[10] The first more progressive impulse was, according to Alan Sinfield, used throughout the war as a prime motivating factor to keep the populace willing to fight; it was, in fact, touted as a goal and a reason why the war was fought.[11] It is well-known that the 1945 Labour government made a number of radical changes to governmental social provisions in response to this war goal. Using the image of the 1942 Beveridge Report, the 'giants' of 'want', 'sickness', 'squalor', 'ignorance' and 'idleness' were addressed with the institution of a collection of reforming legislation: the National Insurance system, the National Health Service, recognition of public responsibility for housing (though most houses were actually built by

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[9] Ann Jellicoe quoted in Doty, G.A. & Harbin, B.J., eds., *Inside the Royal Court Theatre, 1956-1981: Artists Talk*, Baton Rouge, 1990, p.32. Devine's actual quote is reproduced in Wardle, I., *The Theatres of George Devine*, London, 1978, p.169.

[10] Priestley often looked back in his work to an idealised Edwardian England; he had been badly traumatised by his war experiences. Cook, *Priestley*, p.49.

[11] Sinfield, A., *Literature Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, London, 1997, p.14.

post-1951 Conservative administrations), the extension of free education to all, and the nationalisation of large industries such as coal and steel as a strategy for job creation.[12] The contrasting stabilising influence, generally held by those at the higher end of the class ladder who had initially feared that their privileged pre-war mode of existence had departed along with Churchill's government in 1945, soon realised that their lives had not changed substantially.[13] Though the disruptions of war had undoubtedly affected relationships between classes, and the demand for post-war labour in industry had given the working class (manual workers) new bargaining power over wages and conditions, in general governmental and authority structures remained largely unchanged. Most of the more prominent members of the new Labour government were of middle or upper class origin, and the civil service were 74% Oxbridge educated. Similarly, in the nationalised industries the class status of the workers' managers had not changed; indeed, in many cases the managers were the very same people who had held the posts when the business was privately owned. Though the government's education policies would in time raise the opportunities of those born into lower socio-economic circumstances, it cannot be said to have had any definite immediate impact. People lived much as they had done: those with jobs benefited from a collapse in world commodity prices through increased income and spending power, women left their war work and went back to home-making duties, and the royal wedding and coronation of Elizabeth II reinforced the status of both marriage/family and monarchy.[14] Finally, political consensus over not only economic policy but also the broad principles underpinning the Welfare State ensured that a sense of stability emanated through all aspects of life in the period immediately following WW2.

> Alison: You're hurt because everything is changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same. And neither of you can face it. Something's gone wrong somewhere,

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[12] Marwick, A., *Britain in the Century of Total War*, London, 1968, pp. 50, 52, 55, 58, 60-61; Davies, A. & Saunders, P., 'Literature, Politics and Society' in Sinfield, ed., *Society and Literature 1945-1970*, London, 1983, p.14.

[13] See Nigel Nicholson in Sinfield, *Literature Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, p.45.

[14] Marwick, *op.cit.*, pp. 42-43, 47-48, 109.

hasn't it?
Colonel: It looks like it, my dear.[15]

In the mid- to late-1950s British society began to strain at the bonds of consensus, in part through the disintegration of post-war social idealism in the face of economic imperatives. Likened to a squirrel wheel by J.K. Gilbraith, the British people had through full employment and increased wages been set into a cycle of production and consumption that was, as Bogdanor and Skidelsky noted, ultimately a narrowing of human life and expectations:

> The social structure still remained intact; society was still snobbish and acquisitive; the 'white-gloved hand' still waved from the carriage window. One of the paradoxical consequences of affluence and greater equality of opportunity was to narrow human life to the quest for goods, status, position.[16]

A new group of university-educated young men, some of whom had benefited from grant-aided higher education, deplored the failure of the Welfare State to bring about material and lasting changes to British society and agitated for a retreat from shallow consumerism.

> Their philosophy boiled down to an expansion of human awareness, an upgrading of 'authentic' human feelings and experiences, at the expense of the more superficial ones offered by the consumer society.[17]

Termed the New Left or the Angry Young Men, this new movement was alienated from the official Labour movement through its ineffectual efforts at providing an adequate Opposition to government policy. These writers directed their work towards a new and rapidly growing audience of young people from lower class backgrounds who listened to jazz, marched for the CND, and had been made upwardly mobile through education and well-paid employment.[18] For such people, the cosy middle class traditionalism of a Christie play simply could not reflect the everyday reality of their lives. It is at this point that the artifice/naturalist anomaly and the social change of the

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[15] Osborne, J., *Look Back in Anger*, London, 1960, p.68.

[16] Bogdanor, V. & Skidelsky, R., eds., *The Age of Affluence 1951-1964*, London, 1970, p.14.

[17] *ibid.*

[18] It is significant that Jimmy Porter plays jazz trumpet: it links him to other New Left literary creations such as in Amis' novels *Lucky Jim* and *Take a Girl Like You*. Sinfield, *Literature Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, pp.158-159, 174-175.

1950s coincide in the germination of the 'New Wave' contestatory theatrical paradigm. Kenneth Tynan and others believed that the theatre was in a unique position to examine the effect of these societal changes, and called for playwrights to take up the challenge.

> The job of new playwrights is to remove the rubble, to sweep the floor ... Our stages are still overgrown with petty snobberies and glib acceptances; and we still judge plays as if a critic needed no other attributes than an ear for a well-tuned phrase...[19]

The pressures that created societal instability needed to be dramatised, and the most likely vehicle for this dramatisation appeared to be a politicised naturalistic form. Non-naturalistic theatrical forms derived from Europe (such as that of Ionesco) were explicitly derided as artificial and overly cerebral.[20] The New Wave would consist of material that veered sharply away from theatrical artifice, back into a naturalistic 'transparency' that was 'true' to not simply character, environment, sociology and politics, but even emotion and its intensity. Faced with social and economic change in a land only beginning to come to terms with loss of Empire, the solution to the theatre's Crisis of representation was to be "something strong, something simple, something English."[21]

Like the paradigm it wished to replace, the New Wave had its roots in specific managements and theatres: the English Stage Company (ESC) and Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop. Both theatres attempted to cater for audiences that were not targeted by West End managements; they wished to create art for the culturally disenfranchised. The Theatre Workshop hunted

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[19] Tynan, K., 'Theatre and Living' in Maschler, ed., *Declaration*, p.92.

[20] I speak here of 'absurdist' theatre. Brechtian theatre occupied a complicated place in the fabric of British theatre; the best discussions are in Rebellato, *op.cit.*, pp.148-151; Lacey, *op.cit.*, pp.154-159.

[21] Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, p.17; Rebellato, *op.cit.*, pp.142, 146. Though the need to catch up to wide-ranging social change is perhaps the more noticeable factor in the decline of the West End paradigm, changes affecting theatrical management style may also have been a significant, though less public and sudden, factor. In 1957 the Entertainment Tax was repealed, a change which greatly affected Beaumont and H.M. Tennent Ltd. As noted in Chapter 2, Beaumont had developed a virtual monopoly of the British stage by exploiting a loophole in the Entertainment Tax that enabled him to run a non-profit-making arm of Tennents that was tax-exempt. The removal of the Tax levelled the ground somewhat for other impresarios, while the Arts Council's subsidised development of both regional theatres and the National Theatre eroded Beaumont's monopoly over a number of years. (Duff, *op.cit.*, p.102f; Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre*, pp.82, 126-129.)

for audiences amongst the factories and working men's clubs of its East End base, while the ESC, having been led towards their target audience by Tynan's review of *Look Back in Anger*, specifically targeted the new youth: people under 35 with jobs, money, their own music and fashion, but no real political or theatrical representation. Both theatres wanted to create a demotic theatre that both represented the culturally disenfranchised groups and showed them to themselves, and also gave them a means of articulating and perhaps formulating a challenge to the dissatisfactions of their lives. In the following sections we shall examine the ways in which both these the primary exponents of New Wave theatre attempted to define a new theatrical paradigm along these lines, yet were consistently held back by their inability to break away decisively from West End criteria of management and play structure. Section 4.2.1 looks at the companies themselves, detailing their efforts to create new management methodologies that aided their attempts to form a new culturally-based theatrical form while at the same time avoiding the trap of commercialism that so characterised West End theatre, and was so inimical to New Left philosophy; Section 4.2.2 examines the ways in which the plays written between 1956 and 1960 that defined the New Wave tied together a new working class subject matter and setting with a modified naturalistic technique and some conventions derived from other forms of demotic entertainment such as the music halls.

4.2.1 Managements and Working Methods

Management methodology was an area in which both major 'New Wave' companies, the ESC and the Theatre Workshop, strove to create new structures that were wholly distinctive from such West End companies as Tennents, though each company decided upon a different route towards that distinctiveness. The ESC wished to make itself known as a 'writer's theatre'. Artistic Director George Devine was widely known to cherish and respect writers, and worked to create an atmosphere in which playwrights would feel comfortable. Some playwrights who were considered to have promise, including Osborne, Jellicoe and Arnold Wesker, were placed on the payroll as script-readers in order to provide financial support and daily contact with the

management until their plays were produced.[22] The Writer's Group was formed in 1958 in part to assist with these aims, in addition to its role as a forum and support group for writers developing new work. Though criticised by some, including member Donald Howarth, for being potentially elitist, the Writer's Group gave practical aid to some members in their writing. For example, Ann Jellicoe has stated that an improvisation created by the group helped her overcome a block while writing *The Knack*.[23] That Jellicoe maintained connections with the ESC at all after the failure of *The Sport of My Mad Mother* she attributes to the generally supportive atmosphere engendered by Devine.

> In any other theatre the author would have been made to feel not wanted ... but not at the Court ... One kept on writing, and there was never any sense that you weren't welcome because your play had failed.[24]

This 'right to fail' became one of the trademarks of the early Court. Though many writers benefited from the supportive atmosphere at the Court, it is important to remember that not all playwrights were admitted into it, and not all of those who were found the experience wholly positive. For example, although Harold Pinter had two plays performed at the Court, he was never accepted into the ESC fold by Devine, probably because he had received extremely favourable reviews from Harold Hobson. Equally, Arnold Wesker, though a Court writer and member of the Writer's Group, felt that Devine and Tony Richardson did not hold a high opinion of his plays.[25] Even Jellicoe, who had a very positive view of Court policy, had difficulties over production of *The Knack*. After the spectacular failure of *Sport* Devine decided that Jellicoe's new play should be tried out in Cambridge before deciding whether it would be a box office draw in London.[26] The 'right to fail' safety net also did

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[22] David Hare in Doty & Harbin, *op.cit.*, p.151; Findlater, *op.cit.*, p.19.

[23] Doty & Harbin, *op.cit.*, pp.85-8; Jellicoe, A., 'Ann Jellicoe Talks to Sue Todd' in *The Knack and The Sport of My Mad Mother*, London, 1985; Browne, *op.cit.*, p.18; Gaskill, W., *A Sense of Direction*, London, 1988, pp.35-37; Findlater, *At the Royal Court*, Ambergate, 1981, pp.52-56.

[24] Jellicoe quoted in Doty & Harbin, *op.cit.*, p.43.

[25] Gaskill, *op.cit.*, p.35; Findlater, *op.cit.*, pp.80-81.

[26] Jellicoe, 'Ann Jellicoe Talks to Sue Todd', p.13.

not help a writer when dealing with other managements: in these cases, commercial success was still the guarantee of a continued career:

> The Court had this thing about the right to fail, and I was in there with the old spirit of it doesn't matter whether you're a success or not, you just get on with it. I now know – bitter experience has taught me – it's terribly important to be a success. Otherwise you just don't get any more work.[27]

Additionally, we should remember that, just as the Royal Court system of dealing with playwrights was not wholly good, West End managers were not wholly rapacious in their dealings with writers. For example, Frith Banbury played an important role in supporting the playwriting of Wynyard Browne and Rodney Ackland, even going so far as to pay Ackland's bills to keep him from penury.[28] The Royal Court's achievement in its dealings with writers was not in the innovation of creating a lasting relationship between management and playwright, but in its search for methods of making that relationship more regular and supportive.

Equally important in Devine's principle of cultivating playwrights was his insistence that they be involved at every level of production, a policy that continued to be practised at the Court after Devine's retirement. [29] Devine's insistence upon the primacy of the author, as opposed to the director, in the theatrical enterprise came to be understood as the ESC's major point of departure from traditional West End practice, and was grounded in Devine's adherence to a relatively conservative position on authorial intention. Textual fidelity was a principle that Devine had gained through his association with Michel Saint-Denis and the Old Vic Theatre Centre. Saint-Denis later wrote of the Centre:

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[27] *ibid.*, p.12.

[28] Duff, *op.cit.*, pp.146-147. Duff also notes that Banbury optioned Browne's first play for £100, then his next four for £1000, half of the money non-returnable. The favour was returned when Browne ensured Beaumont's support for Banbury as director of Browne's second play *The Holly and the Ivy*. See Duff, pp.64,71, 73.

[29] Churchill in Doty & Harbin, *op.cit.*, p.151:

> You were always involved in the casting, in rehearsal, in working intensely with the director; it is increasingly so elsewhere, but it wasn't and still isn't a totally accepted thing by all other theatres. Also, the text was taken very seriously; you didn't feel it was just an excuse for a director to do something.

> ...our chief practical purpose was wholly and above all to serve interpretation, and that in dealing with an important play it was healthy to consider the author as the only completely creative person: director, designer, and actor had to understand the author's intention and submit to it.[30]

At the ESC a writer's work was very rarely cut. Certainly Arnold Wesker has commented that Devine and Richardson attempted to persuade him to rewrite sections of *Roots*, but the fact that such an instance is considered remarkable highlights its uncharacteristic nature.[31]

The ESC's prioritisation of the author's word in their theatrical practice perhaps reached its artistic climax in the Court's institution of the Sunday night 'productions without décor', which were intended as a testing-ground for plays and playwrights not yet ready for full production on the main stage. The austere style of the performances, conceived as quasi-dress rehearsals with limited set and costume indicators, indicate the philosophy that only when shorn of potentially misleading attention-seeking frills would the audience see the play in its 'true' state.

> ...what is important is not the "sort of theatre" – but the PLAY ... From the actors, humility before the words, truthfulness to character, complete purity of feeling.[32]

Anderson's implication in this passage is that the production 'without décor' is more capable of freely expressing feeling, and that by implication characterisation and emotion are hampered and disguised by the introduction of scenery and costume. The Court in fact worked to limit all interpretive efforts by the audience in order to project their image of the author's intention. Programmes became filled with directorial statements and contextual information in order to guide the audience's attention along a desired path of interpretive enquiry. Even the Court building itself was altered so as to downgrade the status of theatrical illusion and make more 'real' – and therefore (in a sense) non-interpretive – the meaning and emotion of the performance. Michael Hallifax, general stage manager at the ESC

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[30] Saint-Denis, M., *Theatre: the Rediscovery of Style*, London, 1960, p.92.

[31] Findlater, *op.cit.*, p.80f; Doty & Harbin, *op.cit.*, p.51; Wardle, *op.cit.*, p.179.

[32] Anderson, L., 'Vital Theatre?' in Marowitz, C., Milne, T., Hale, O., *New Theatre Voices of the Fifties and Sixties*, London, 1981, p.43. See also Browne, T.W., *Playwright's Theatre*, London, 1975, p.37.

until 1959, has recounted that he and Devine transformed the theatre by removing the stage cloth, house tabs, house border and stage borders, as well as covering over the orchestra pit. Though this was in part done because there were insufficient funds to cover repairs or replacement items, it also made a significant impact upon the audience's reception to the work onstage. The play was no longer 'art' in a golden frame to be gazed at, but actually moved beyond naturalist philosophy of objectivism; the removal of the frame removed the boundary between one reality and another, making the characters on the stage more completely a part of the world of the audience than Zola had ever intended. The auditorium, stripped of its finery and turned into shabby utilitarian space, merged into the working class shabbiness of the settings of plays such as *Look Back in Anger*, effectively blurring the distinction between audience and stage.[33]

The last major factor in which the ESC attempted to define themselves in opposition to the West End paradigm was in their efforts, also visible in the Theatre Workshop's practice, to form a permanent acting company that would perform plays in repertoire. It was hoped that this method of presentation would allow more successful plays to carry those that were having difficulty finding an audience. Certainly the ESC were generally considered successful in working toward these aims; upon his retirement from the post of Artistic Director, George Devine stated that he and the ESC "had fought the commercial theatre and won."[34] A closer look at the finances of the company over Devine's leadership reveals, however, that the ESC was perhaps not as able to repudiate the hard economic realities of the West End management style as they had envisaged. According to Irving Wardle, "finances were always shaky and the company repeatedly found themselves on the rocks," and relations with the Board were frequently icy as a result. On the artistic front, Tom Milne noted in *Encore* that by May 1958 only seven of nineteen productions were premieres, and that of 139 actors employed to that date, 86 had been engaged for one role only. Of the plays

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[33] Rebellato, *op.cit.*, pp.114-115, 121; Hallifax in Doty & Harbin, *op.cit.*, pp.39-40; Wardle, *op.cit.*, p.172.

[34] Hinchcliffe, *op.cit.*, p.47. See also Browne, *op.cit.*, p.12.

premiered, only Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer* made significant profits, while Jellicoe's *The Sport of My Mad Mother* was withdrawn after 14 performances, having filled only 35% of the Court's seats.[35] Such figures suggest that, however desirable a permanent repertory company may have been, the ESC simply found it too expensive to keep large numbers of actors on salary and quantities of scenery in storage. Additionally, at least in the first three years, Devine obviously found it necessary to supplement the unpredictable income from the premieres with some slightly more 'commercial' productions such as *The Country Wife* and *Lysistrata*, and to cast actors more frequently on a show-by-show basis.[36] Finally, the hastened withdrawal of Jellicoe's play from the stage, despite its well-documented support from all ESC personnel, indicates that the revenue gained from the outstandingly successful runs of the Osborne plays was not sufficient to nurse along those plays by other writers which had not enjoyed the same acclaim, merely to assist in their initial production costs. Though the Court received financial support from the Arts Council, the subsidy system was in its infancy, and comparatively little money was available for distribution.[37] In spite of receiving larger grants than most organisations, the ESC subsidy was hardly substantial in comparison to the theatre's running costs. In their first year they received £2500 plus a one-off subsidy of £7000, while in 1957 this grant increased to £5000. In comparison, the Theatre Workshop in 1954, after much wrangling, received a grant of a mere £150.[38]

Joan Littlewood's work with the Theatre Workshop, though contemporaneous with the formative years of the ESC, bears little resemblance to it in terms of working methods, yet also makes significant attempts to forge a management methodology entirely separate from the conventions of West End theatre practice. Beginning life as a left-leaning

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[35] Wardle, *op.cit.*, p.186; Milne, T., 'Taking Stock at The Court' in Marowitz et.al., *New Theatre Voices of the Fifties and Sixties*, pp.63-64, 66; Findlater, *At the Royal Court*, p.246; Lacey, *op.cit.*, p.53.

[36] Doty & Harbin, *op.cit.*, p.45; Wardle, *op.cit.*, p.188.

[37] Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre*, p.131.

[38] Browne, *op.cit.*, pp.12-13, 112; Rebellato, *op.cit.*, p.67; Findlater, *op.cit.*, p.16; Goorney, H., *The Theatre Workshop Story*, London, 1981, pp.138, 214; Littlewood, J., *Joan's Book*, London, 1994, p.463.

touring company which in 1953 settled in London's East End, its chief distinguishing characteristic, apart from a continual lack of resources, was its attempt to adhere to the principles of collaborative effort through a trained permanent ensemble, as Littlewood explained:

> I do not believe in the supremacy of the director, designer, actor or even of the writer. It is through collaboration that this knockabout art of theatre survives and kicks ... No one mind or imagination can foresee what a play will become...[39]

Unlike most professional actors, who would only encounter systematic physical training at drama school, the actors in the Theatre Workshop underwent regular movement and voice training, with the intention of improving their skill and flexibility. The movement work was heavily based upon the theories of Rudolf Laban, being used during rehearsals and, in the early years at Stratford, before performances in order to assist the actors in developing the physical aspects of the characters they played.[40] Movement was used by Littlewood as a means of entry into a text; rather than beginning with the words in the script, even in classic plays the company would begin rehearsals with improvisations designed to explore the relationships between characters, as well as the atmosphere of the play. For example, the cast of Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* did not receive scripts until the rehearsal process was well advanced. Instead, Littlewood eased the actors into the mood of the play by improvising around the prison setting.

> She took us up on to the roof of the Theatre Royal ... We formed up a circle, and imagined we were prisoners out on exercise ... The interesting thing was that when she gave us the scripts we found that many of the situations we had improvised actually occurred in the play.[41]

When working on new plays this improvisatory work was extended to include the writer, so that by group effort the playwright's (written) script could be

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[39] Littlewood, J., 'Goodbye Note From Joan' in Marowitz et al., *op.cit.*, p.133. For a detailed account of the formation of the Theatre Workshop see Goorney, *op.cit.*, especially pp.87-88 for the move to London.

[40] Sanderson, *op.cit.*, pp.191-193; Goorney, *op.cit.*, pp.159-160.

[41] Milne, T. & Goodwin, C. 'Working With Joan' in Marowitz, C. and Trussler, S., eds., *Theatre at Work*, London, 1967, p.116f. See also Goorney, *op.cit.*, pp.105, 167. Stanislavski, an influence upon the Theatre Workshop's techniques, attempted similar rehearsal methods in his final production, *Tartuffe*; see Toporkov, *op.cit.*, pp.165-166.

re-written and re-shaped to produce a theatrical (acted) text.[42] For example, Frank Norman's *Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'be* evolved from forty-eight pages of dialogue into a musical via improvisations in which Norman took part.[43] Unlike Shelagh Delaney, who professed not to have even noticed the changes made to *A Taste of Honey*, Norman later resented the imposition of this form of rehearsal:

> With every day that passed my original conception of the play seemed to drift further and further away, until eventually I was hardly able to identify with the antics on the stage at all ...[44]

Such public avowals of discontent led to the accusation that Littlewood was 'devaluing the word', but the contentment of other writers such as Behan with the work done to make material work in theatrical terms suggests that perhaps many of these disputes arose from a misunderstanding over Littlewood's conception of authorial intention, which was evidently far more liberal than that held by George Devine.[45]

Littlewood and colleague Ewan McColl adapted ideas from various Continental theories of drama to the needs of the Workshop. Stanislavski can be cited as one of the more prominent influences upon the group, particularly in its insistence upon individuals working in and for the ensemble. Also distinctly Stanislavskian is Littlewood's method of directing actors not by giving them a movement or blocking, as would be the more usual method of working in a time-pressured repertory company, but rather giving the actor a reason or objective to initiate movement. [46] Performance was not considered a goal or an end to the growth process begun in rehearsal. Littlewood would

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[42] Lacey, *op.cit.*, p.50. Littlewood compared the Workshop's rehearsal methods to those of the *commedia dell'arte*, see Taylor, *Anger and After*, p.102.

[43] Marowitz et.al., *op.cit.*, p.118. See also Norman, F., *Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'be*, London, 1960, pp.5-6.

[44] Norman quoted in Goorney, *op.cit.*, p.112.

[45] Sets and costumes underwent a similar process of evolution and transformation through rehearsals. Costumers would supply actors with a 'mock-up' costume at the beginning of rehearsals, especially for period plays, and would gradually adapt it according to the demands of the actor and character. Similarly, model sets supplied at first rehearsal were regarded as a basis upon which ideas from the cast and director could be moulded. See Goorney, *op.cit.*, pp.93, 96.

[46] Marowitz & Trussler, *op.cit.*, p.119; also pp.120, 116; Benedetti, J., *Stanislavski and the Actor*, London, 1998, p.104; Stanislavski, C., *Creating a Role*, London, 1988, pp.131-134.

effect improvements and changes to a production via improvisations right up until the first performance, and afterwards would keep a show fresh by re-rehearsing and bombarding the cast with notes, comments and suggestions.[47]

By 1958, however, the innovations in the Theatre Workshop's working methods began to be sacrificed to the demands of increased income. The extremely limited subsidy the company received from the Arts Council and local borough councils, as well as the minimal local audience, were insufficient to keep it afloat, forcing the increased reliance on income generated by West End transfers of successful productions. These had the effect of breaking up the permanent ensemble, disrupting the vocal and physical training programme, and thus making it difficult for new actors joining the company to respond to Littlewood's directorial approach. The susceptibility of the Workshop to economic pressure was detrimental to its potential as a successor or rival to West End theatre, and the apparent strength of Littlewood's control of the rehearsal process also questions the extent of the Workshop's success as a collaborative, rather than 'producer's theatre'.[48]

4.2.2 The Plays: Reconfiguring Language and Reality

Perhaps the most obvious change to the subject matter of British theatre of the 'New Wave' is its portrayal of the lives and voices of people who do not belong to the gentrified middle classes. Though the dramatisation of those considered 'working class' had been attempted by others prior to 1956, most notably by D.H. Lawrence, for the first time a significant number of dramatists regularly began to delve beyond the confines of comfortable sitting rooms. Brendan Behan dramatised prison life in *The Quare Fellow*, Arnold Wesker the life of farm workers in *Roots*, Ann Jellicoe disenfranchised street youth in *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, and Shelagh Delaney and Frank Norman the working class and criminal fringe in *A Taste*

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[47] Goorney, *op.cit.*, pp.172-5. Stanislavski used improvisation throughout the rehearsal process; see Toporkov, *op.cit.*, p.50.

[48] Lacey, *op.cit.*, 51f; Goorney, *op.cit.*, pp.99, 101, 107; *op.cit.*, p.135; Hinchcliffe, *op.cit.*, p.171f.

of Honey and *Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'be.*[49] Most 'New Wave' plays are set in a specifically modern context; Bamber Gascoigne noted that the *Observer* Play Competition of 1957 interpreted social significance as only belonging to plays "set in the here and now," linking relevance and contemporaneity indissolubly.[50] Many of the plays use at least some degree of naturalistic staging in the dramatisation of their contemporary setting. In *Look Back in Anger*, for example, the attic room box set not merely provides a physical location for Jimmy Porter's impotent rage, but informs an audience's understanding of it, and is an active contributor to it: the attic, compounded by external influences such as the rain, is a constant reminder to Jimmy of the impotence of his life and hopes.[51] Much of the naturalistic detail of *Anger* and Wesker's *Roots* is written into the script, as with the ironing board and Beatie's bath, thus making any non-naturalistic staging concept difficult to conceive without altering or excision of dialogue. Even when a script calls for abbreviated realism, as in the Rice family scenes in *The Entertainer*, the activities of the characters require such everyday items as bottles and glasses, which provide a naturalistic gloss to a scene that is otherwise staged more non-naturalistically.[52] John Arden is a notable exception to the prevailing trend of the equivalence of social significance with contemporaneity. He instead sought to depict contemporary issues using past theatrical forms, particularly those from British popular culture:

> What I am deeply concerned with is the problem of translating the concrete life of today into terms of poetry that shall at the one

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[49] Innes, C., *Modern British Drama 1890-1990*, p.115. It is interesting to note that though *Look Back in Anger* with its grubby attic room setting and sweet stall proprietors was considered to be at the forefront of the trend towards 'working class' drama (it was regularly described as Bohemian or working class by its first reviewers), when examined closely it is no more radical in its setting than Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea*. Just as Rattigan sets his characters in a shabby flat but takes care to emphasise that the characters are really middle class people fallen on rough times (Freddie is a test pilot and met Hester at a golf club), so too does Osborne's attic room contain main characters to which he gives comfortable backgrounds. Jimmy not only has been to university and presumably could find more comfortable employment than the sweet stall, but also has wealthy relations, who Cliff describes as being rather like Alison's family. This similarity to Rattigan's stagecraft is ironic in the light of Rattigan's own remark about the play upon seeing the original production: "'Look Ma, how unlike Terence Rattigan I'm being'!"(Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, pp.30, 42, 64; Taylor, J.R., ed., *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger, Casebook Series*, London, 1968, pp.35, 39, 40, 44, 46.)

[50] Gascoigne, *op.cit.*, p.83.

[51] Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, pp.15, 25.

[52] Osborne, *The Entertainer*, London, 1961, pp.11-12.

> time both illustrate that life and set it within the historical and legendary tradition of our time. [53]

Sergeant Musgrave's Dance, for example, is based upon a contemporary incident which occurred in Cyprus, but was remoulded and transported back to the Victorian era and dramatised using a set of characters traditionally familiar from the cast lists of Victorian melodrama.[54] That Arden's work was never entirely acceptable to ESC audiences raises the question of how much the initial reaction to this play may be attributed to the audience's expectations of Court shows: expecting contemporaneity, Arden's clothing of contemporary issues in historical contexts may have been too different for the audience to handle.

More important than the generally 'working class' settings, however, is the use to which the playwrights put them as sites for the examination of (generally left-wing) social and political activism. *Look Back in Anger*, for example, was particularly noted on its first performance for the strength of its politicised invective: its reviewers in general took the play as a dramatisation of the political powerlessness of the young generation.[55] While in the West End theatre paradigm there seemed to be a pre-occupation with personal identity, destiny and moral scruples, after 1956 British dramatists began to move away from personal dilemmas towards frequently despairing examinations of human life in the community, asking how people communicate, and about the nature of personal relationships and their relation to the world at large. For example, in *The Entertainer* John Osborne examines the link between personal apathy in the face of world affairs and the crisis of communication within the family circle. The Rice family, when faced with the capture and death of their son Mick in the Suez crisis, find themselves unable to communicate beyond surface-level chat and half-heard intersecting monologues fuelled by alcohol; the family are neither able to

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[53] Arden in Marowitz et.al., *op.cit.*, p.125; see also Anderson, M., *Anger and Detachment: A Study of Arden, Osborne and Pinter*, London, 1976, p.51; Worth, *op.cit.*, p.126.

[54] Worth, *op.cit.*, p.127. Worth also suggests that the strength of colour in both the staging and costume used in *Musgrave* is also derivative of Victorian melodrama.

[55] See reviews by Hope-Wallace, Shulman, Barber and Tynan in Elsom, J., *Post-War Theatrical Criticism*, London, 1981, pp.78-79.

address their bereavement, nor the wider political issues associated with it. [56] Osborne links the inability of the family to exhibit any emotional solidarity with a general societal inability to care about community projects like Jean's art classes, which are sneered at by her fiancé Graham, or demonstrations like the one attended by Jean in Trafalgar Square, which the Rice family scorn. Instead, Jean finally announces "we've only ourselves," a philosophy whose barrenness and defeatism is echoed in her father's dead eyes and cynical songs. [57]

Though the New Wave dramatists made significant attempts at innovation in the content or subject matter of their plays, this was not always underpinned by a similar degree of innovation in the play's form, that is, the plot structure and characterisation. Many of the more prominent plays of the period rely to a greater or lesser extent upon at least some of the structural conventions that last chapter were described as hallmarks of the West End paradigm. In *Look Back in Anger* and *Roots* this debt is particularly evident: both plays are neatly constructed 3 act plays with Aristotelian beginnings, middles and endings.[58] In *Look Back in Anger* the structure of the play is made particularly noticeable by the symmetry created by the near identical stage pictures at the beginning of the first and third acts. It is frequently described as technically anachronistic, and even Osborne himself called its stagecraft

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[56] Osborne, *The Entertainer*, p.43.See also Trussler, S., *The Plays of John Osborne: An Assessment*, London, 1969, p.59.

[57] Osborne, *The Entertainer*, p.61; p.85. Similar issues are addressed in Arnold Wesker's *Roots*. Beatie Bryant goes home to her family in Norfolk apparently inspired by her London boyfriend and his political convictions, and tries to encourage her family to a similar interest. Beatie and her family, however, appear to have difficulty listening to each other. (Wesker, A., *Roots* in The *Wesker Trilogy*, London, 1966, p.112.) Beatie's inability to communicate with her family is finally shown to mirror Beatie's failure to communicate with Ronnie. When at the end of the play Beatie finds her own voice she expands on a remark she made earlier in the play: that talking is more than a bridge between people. (p.149.) Rootlessness for Wesker is a failure to become an active participant in world affairs, as is typified by the family's unquestioning acceptance of Mr Bryant's demotion to casual labour, and a primary cause of this inactivity is the inability to take advantage of the power of language. (Leeming, G., *Wesker: the Playwright*, London, 1983, pp.6, 45.)

[58] A basic plot summary for *Roots* could be described as follows:
Condition of the action: Beatie tries to harangue her family into life by parroting the ideas of her boyfriend Ronnie.
Cause of the action: Beatie begins to understand that she parrots Ronnie.
Resulting action: Will Beatie speak for herself?
Climax: Ronnie jilts Beatie by letter.

"old-fashioned."[59] Osborne recalls both the West End paradigm in his usage of Scribean end of act climaxes, and also Ibsen in his reconstitution of those climaxes from physical to psychological action. For example, Osborne prepares for the end of Act 1 by revealing Alison's pregnancy, then announces Helena's imminent arrival, thus giving Jimmy a reason to become savage, then assembles all three characters on stage for Jimmy's final tirade.[60]

In *The Entertainer* Osborne begins to break up the well-made plot structure by framing the more naturalistic scenes involving the Rice family in an overtly music hall presentation, with each short episode being announced as a 'turn' on cards at the side of the stage and interspersed with Archie's routines and even a nude tableau.[61] Osborne nostalgically appropriated the conventions of the dying music hall form because he wished to connect to a part of England that he believed to be dying: the debasement and death of the music hall became a metaphor for the 'State of the Nation'.[62] The music hall conventions also provided Osborne with a means of circumventing the restrictiveness of the naturalistic stage:

> I believe that [the techniques of the music hall] can solve some of the eternal problems of time and space that face the dramatist ... Not only has this technique its own traditions, its own convention and symbol, its own mystique, it cuts right across the restrictions of the so-called naturalistic stage. Its contact is immediate, vital, and direct.[63]

Rather than being confined to one set, a small set of characters and naturalistic dialogue, Osborne uses the music hall conventions to widen his focus, moving the action to and from the family home to Archie's stage, and using songs as a means of projecting emotion more quickly and easily than

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[59] Osborne, J., 'That Awful Museum' in Taylor, *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger*, p.66. Osborne is described as technically anachronistic by various contributors to *ibid.*, p.20, p.76, p.101, etc.

[60] Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, p37f. See Rusinko, S., *British Drama 1950 to the Present: A Critical History*, Boston, 1989, pp.38-39 for a fuller analysis of the well-made structure of *Look Back in Anger*.

[61] e.g. Osborne, *The Entertainer*, pp.9, 12, 61. See also Innes, *op.cit.*, p.104; Cohn, *op.cit.*, p.97f.

[62] Lacey, *op.cit.*, p.104.

[63] Osborne, *The Entertainer*, p.7.

dialogue could achieve.[64] To Osborne, therefore, the music hall technique is another means of conveying to an audience the scarifying emotional honesty of his characters. Behan's *The Quare Fellow* and Arden's *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* further depart from the predominantly naturalistic paradigmatic structure by utilising not only music hall, but also bardic/balladic and other structural devices loosely described as Brechtian.[65] The plot structure of *Musgrave* as well as the way it is delivered by the characters depends to a large extent upon English folk balladic tradition. Snippets of songs (ballads), both sung and spoken, litter the text, and are frequently used as a means by which the play's ideological argument is moved forward. For example, early in the play Musgrave delivers the phrase "We have our duty. A soldier's life is a soldier's duty." This is immediately undercut by the Bargee singing a short snatch of song which questions Musgrave's lofty values. [66] Arden makes use of the apparently simple form of the ballad to tell a basic tale and simultaneously conduct a critique of both the incidents in the tale and the participants. Naturalistic character detail is neither given nor required, as the 'characters' in the tale are little more than functionaries tasked with illustrating the reason why the story is being told. For example, though some may find the concept of a group of soldiers refusing the nocturnal attentions of a young female unlikely behaviour, in the context of the storyline the action is necessary, as it demonstrates the various soldiers' reactions and commitment to Musgrave's plans; at that

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[64] Lacey, *op.cit.*, p.104.

[65] Arden, J., 'Telling a True Tale' in Marowitz et.al., eds., *New Theatre*, p.127. Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* also demonstrates the use of music hall and balladic techniques. Within the overall structural pattern of *The Quare Fellow*, in which the audience watch the prisoners and warders as they watch and wait for the hanging of the quare fellow, there are many small episodes which, though not strictly essential to the plot, supply the audience with valuable understanding of the harshness of prison life. For example, early in the play the reprieved murderer asks the other prisoners for a cigarette, and is told that the only cigarettes available are the fag-ends picked up from the exercise yard after the condemned prisoners have dropped them. (Behan, B., *The Quare Fellow*, London, 1956, p.11.) Though it is unlikely that Behan was directly influenced by Brecht, such examples of the casual brutalisation of the prisoners are stylistically similar to equivalent scenes in *The Good Person of Szechwan*, and like the scenes in that play Behan's prison snapshots are broken up by short snatches of song. (e.g. Brecht, B., *The Good Person of Szechwan* in *Collected Plays: Six*, ed. J. Willett & R. Manheim, London, 1994, pp.22-25; Behan, *op.cit.*, pp.9-10.) This was possibly influenced by the music hall, as late in his life Behan expressed his fondness for that theatrical form. (Kearney, C., *The Writings of Brendan Behan*, Dublin, 1977, p.130.)

[66] Arden, J., *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* in *Plays: One*, London, 1994, p.236. See also Worth, *op.cit.*, p.128; Gray, F., *John Arden*, London, 1982, p.58.

moment in the play, they are demonstrating three different reactions to the idea of a soldier's duty.[67] The primacy of situation and social significance over individual or personal states of mind is heavily reminiscent of Brechtian ideas of character, and certainly Arden was an admirer of Brecht's plays.[68]

In spite of Arden's experimentation with Brechtian characterisation, generally the New Wave's treatment of character is little different from that of the West End, for though superficially different in class background, the lead characters in New Wave plays still conform to the same naturalistic need for articulacy of expression as those of the previous paradigm. Perhaps in order to circumvent a tension resulting from the conflict between the desire to portray the lives of (potentially inarticulate) working-class people but do so in a form – social realism – that entails clarity of expression, New Wave dramatists took advantage of the democratisation of education by the 1944 Education Act. Many leading characters have, whether directly or indirectly, benefited from post-war education policy: Jimmy Porter went to university, Jean Rice is working and is the one of the Rice family who will "get somewhere", Ronnie Kahn teaches Beatie Bryant about books and music, and Jo of *A Taste of Honey* is initially a schoolgirl. The education received by these characters gives them an advantage of articulacy over their friends and relations, as for example in *Roots*, where Beatie is able to articulate her distaste at her father's shabby treatment by his boss when the rest of her family seems ill-prepared or unwilling to do so.[69] Their educational advantage does, however, seem to separate these characters from those whom they wish to champion or protect. Jimmy Porter, for example, is clearly fond of Hugh's mother, but recognises that she is "deprived and ignorant." Similarly, Jean's development of a political consciousness drives a wedge between her and her family.[70] The New Wave playwrights were truly dramatising not the lives of the working-class, but the social and personal

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[67] Arden, *op.cit.*, p278ff., Gray, *op.cit.*, pp.12-14.

[68] Brecht, B., *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. & ed. J. Willett, 2nd ed., London, 1996, pp.104-5; Gray, *op.cit.*, pp.8, 14.

[69] Wesker, *Roots*, p.118, p.136; Osborne, *The Entertainer*, p.20. Later playwrights such as Edward Bond attempted to dramatise inarticulacy; e.g. *Saved* and *The Pope's Wedding*.

[70] Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, pp.62, 73; Osborne, *The Entertainer*, pp.28-29.

dilemmas of those educated youths who were slowly discovering that they no longer held the same beliefs or aspirations as their working-class friends and relations.[71]

Just as *Look Back in Anger* relied heavily on paradigmatic conventions of play structure, so too does the momentum of the play depend on the use of the dialogue to convey essential plot and character information. Indeed, on occasions the dialogue becomes almost top-heavy with information, as in Alison's scenes with her father and Helena.[72] Perhaps Osborne's most interesting adoption of West End technique, however, is his attempt in *Look Back in Anger* to modify Rattigan's technique of using unemotional language to indicate repressed emotion. Used by Rattigan to dramatise Hester's relationship with Freddie in *The Deep Blue Sea*, in *Anger* Osborne uses similar techniques to dramatise the crisis of communication between Alison and Jimmy. In certain parts of the play Osborne uses Rattigan's technique unchanged, as in this conversation after Alison is burned by the iron:

> Jimmy: I'm sorry.
> Alison: I know.
> Jimmy: I mean it.
> Alison: There's no need.
> Jimmy: I did it on purpose.
> Alison: Yes.[73]

The sparseness of the writing in this passage is strongly reminiscent of Hester's final words with Freddie in Rattigan's play. Osborne reserves his most exuberant use of language for speeches in which Jimmy's emotional outburst is combined with socio-political statement, in what Andrew Kennedy has described as "histrionic rhetoric thrust into conventional realism," a kind of verbal 'displacement activity' which attempts to cover his impotence in the field of genuine personal communication.[74] However much

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[71] This seems to be confirmed by Lacey's opinion that the Royal Court did not, as some claim, democratise theatre and open it up to a wider potential audience, but rather catered to educated ex-working-class youths, who were going to the theatre as a means of imbibing a form of middle-class culture. Lacey describes this process as 'embourgeoisement'. Lacey, *op.cit.*, pp.56-57, 79.

[72] e.g. Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*, pp.43-46.

[73] *ibid.*, p.33.

[74] Kennedy, A.K., *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language*, London, 1975, pp.193, 210.

Osborne is considered to be a political playwright, in this play at least the rhetoric is in part a disguise for Jimmy's fear of communicating with Alison, as well as a means of goading an equally histrionic response from her. In a sense, the fact that Jimmy lashes out at nearly everyone with whom he comes into contact may be viewed as his defence mechanism to prevent anyone coming too close to him emotionally, an action which may be said to hark back to the dramas of personal identity of the West End paradigm, which asked 'how can I love and be loved?'

> [Freddie Page] was also something of an allegorical figure for the time – a war hero, living in the past and unable to come to terms with the present; beginning to age, his talents no longer in demand, he finds it difficult to make a satisfactory life or to find a job; his good intentions rebound on him. He could have been a symbol for Britain itself in 1952.[75]

With only minor alterations, the above description of one of the lead characters of Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea* could be very neatly transferred to John Osborne's (anti)hero Jimmy Porter. Like Freddie Page, Porter is lost in his present-day world, unable to find a niche for himself outside of a past which, unlike Page, he cannot even claim to have owned. The similarity between these two ne'er-do-wells is striking, for it tells us much about the degree to which the playwrights of the New Wave in their formative plays were compromised by the degree to which they borrowed from (West End) naturalistic technique. Just as with the works of Priestley and Eliot discussed last chapter, the fact that so much of New Wave play structure was tied to a subversion or re-casting of naturalistic technique, especially in the areas of characterisation and plot in the earlier plays of Osborne and Wesker, made the plays too similar to those of the West End to be an effective contestatory paradigm. Naturalistic sets aped the audience's expectations of how an attic room or a farmhouse should look,[76] and the characters peopling the set conformed to expectations about the degree of articulacy needed to make them useful plot devices while still looking and sounding much as young people or farmers would be expected to look or

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[75] Darlow & Hodson, *op.cit.*, p.203.

[76] I am speaking here primarily of the settings as required by the playwrights themselves.

sound. Most importantly, Osborne and Wesker provided their audiences with stories that conformed to the West End paradigm's appropriation of Scribean structure; even the structurally more experimental *The Entertainer* has a clear beginning, middle and end. Another telling element in the eventual failure of the New Wave to create a sustained opposition or recognisable successor to the West End paradigm, lay in the conflicting amounts of subsidy each theatre attracted. As noted earlier, the Theatre Workshop were effectively strangled by their lack of Arts Council subsidy, as the resultant need for commercial box office success weakened their artistic integrity. By contrast, the Royal Court writers were in effect muzzled by the subsidies that the theatre received:

> English society has (or had until 1979) a great capacity to incorporate dissident movements. Each attempt to subvert the system is quickly granted, on certain conditions, a space, so becoming not just an aspect of the system but an evidence of its flexibility and beneficence.[77]

In respect of this observation by Sinfield, Bogdanor and Skidelsky suggest that the subsidies given to the Royal Court achieved just this sort of incorporation of New Left dissident theatre.[78] By giving the Royal Court public money to produce plays by New Left writers, the Arts Council were in effect neutralising the movement's 'outsider' status, thus diluting any political message the writers were attempting to convey. The later careers of the playwrights at the centre of the New Left, interestingly, largely moved away from mainstream theatre. Osborne continued to write for the theatre, but never again with the same degree of critical or popular success; Arden and Jellicoe both moved into the field of community theatre; Delaney became involved primarily in film; and Wesker, after a number of other plays of varying success, became virtually unproduceable in Britain, though popular in other countries. Evidently, the most prominent writers of the New Left discovered that in order to retain their philosophical position, they had to abandon the structures that had brought them to public attention.

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[77] Sinfield, 'The Theatre and its Audiences' in *Society and Literature 1945-1970*, p.192.

[78] Bogdanor & Skidelsky, *op.cit.*, p.14.

Perhaps, however, the most interesting point of failure in the New Wave paradigm was that it was *too* tied to physical locations. The Royal Court became the prime locus of the New Wave enterprise, aided by a relatively central location – certainly in comparison to the Theatre Workshop – and its promotion by Kenneth Tynan. The result of this coupling of location and paradigm has been an equally intimate relation in critical terms between the plays produced by the Court and the paradigm. Generally speaking, any writer who had work produced at the Court that dealt with working class or youth issues is frequently considered part of the New Wave movement, a classification that does not do sufficient justice to the innovativeness of some playwrights who have perhaps been incorrectly labelled. Ann Jellicoe seems to be a prime example of this trait. She is mentioned very little in critical assessments of the period, receiving 10 pages of comment in Taylor's *Anger and After* and consistently less in each new assessment that is published.[79] The reason for this is identified by Taylor: Jellicoe ploughed "obstinately her solitary furrow."[80] Her work displays conspicuous and fundamental differences to most other New Wave works which, though there is insufficient spaces in these pages to cover to the degree deserved, are briefly mentioned here. Unlike the New Wave dramatists, Jellicoe circumvents the tension implicit in the presentation of working-class concerns as social realism by developing a method of presentation that takes advantage of inarticulacy of expression as a means of characterisation. In *Sport* and *The Knack*, for example, Jellicoe reappraised the degree to which stage dialogue is used as the means of narrating a play's actions and character development. Jellicoe explains:

> In my first play *The Sport of My Mad Mother* character and motive were shown in action not described in words; to give a simple example instead of a man saying 'I'm angry', he was angry.[81]

Though the technique of demonstrating action via specific dialogue patterns rather than directly narrating it could hardly be described as Jellicoe's

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[79] Taylor, J.R., *The Angry Theatre*, rev.ed., New York, 1969, pp.73-83. Jellicoe's works are mentioned only in passing by Innes, Lacey and Rebellato.

[80] Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.80.

[81] Jellicoe, 'Preface' to *Shelley, or, The Idealist*, London, 1966, p.13.

discovery, her application of the device to the drama of the frustrated and inarticulate youths in *Sport* is highly innovative.

> Now, my play is about incoherent people – people who have no power of expression, of analysing their emotions. They don't know why they're afraid; they don't even know that they are afraid.[82]

Jellicoe dramatises this lack of expression through characters who do not speak rational thoughts in rounded sentences. Rather, their dialogue consists in the main of a collection of jagged stichomythic phrases, nonsense syllables and incantations, drawn together into a near-musical score, which "creates in the theatre a sort of symbolic equivalent of the mental climate in which they live and thrusts us willy-nilly into it."[83] Jellicoe circumvents the naturalistic tension between the need for characters to articulate their concerns clearly to the audience and yet be recognisably 'real' youths of limited speech capacity by sacrificing entirely the naturalistic objectivity of the audience. Jellicoe's audience is not a privileged observer but a collection of individuals just as perplexed by the characters and their actions as the characters appear to be themselves. Similarly, in *The Knack* Jellicoe demonstrates that apparently normal and articulate people can be caught at a point of total irrationality and inarticulacy when ruled by fear, emotion and jealousy. The action of the play is not driven by the denotative content of the dialogue, but rather by the combination of the dialogue and the activities the characters perform while speaking. The bed/piano scene, for example, consists of over a page of pings, pongs and plongs, but when considered in the context of character relationships and specific activities performed during the scene, clearly involves two of the characters beginning to express sexual interest in each other, to the exclusion of another:

Colin:	Plong.
	(Pause)
Nancy:	Plong.
	(Pause)
Colin:	Plong.
Tolen:	Why be so childish about a bed?[84]

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[82] Jellicoe quoted in Taylor, *Anger and After*, p.67.

[83] Taylor, *Anger and After*, p.67. For examples of the stichomythia, nonsense and incantations: Jellicoe, *The Knack and The Sport of My Mad Mother*, pp.114-115, 132-136.

[84] Jellicoe, *The Knack*, p.54; Taylor, *The Angry Theatre*, p.79.

In such New Wave plays as *The Entertainer* characters are placed within a broadly recognisable social milieu.[85] By contrast, Ann Jellicoe places her plays in settings which seem entirely divorced from all recognisable humanity, rationality and reality. In neither *The Knack* nor *The Sport of My Mad Mother* is there any attempt to connect the stage action to any recognisable contemporary socio-political context. Equally, there is no character who provides the audience with an objective view of the action; whereas in *The Deep Blue Sea* Rattigan used Collyer as a sounding-board with little part in the main action to convey Hester's emotional dilemma to the audience, in *Sport* there exists no character who specifically functions as a conduit for plot and thematic material. This is the case partly as a result of the studied irrationality of the dialogue, but primarily because it is not the playwright's intention to provide the audience with a clear understanding of the onstage action.[86] No character remains immune from the apparently irrational game-playing of the others; though Steve in *Sport* begins the play with pretensions to uninvolved observation, by the end of Act 1 he has been drawn into the action. Similarly, in *The Knack* Nancy is drawn into the bed/piano game within minutes of entering the house.[87] In both plays the divorce of the stage action from any specific social or political milieu enables Jellicoe to examine in microcosm the morality of "how you should treat other people."[88] *Sport*, for example, describes a world where traditional or 'normal' moral values have become defunct. The characters fight, both amongst themselves and against others offstage, for supremacy of the gang and its territory, and Dodo, Dean and even Steve are drawn into the violence that results. The gang members constantly shift allegiances between themselves and others, alternately supporting and decrying Greta, attacking Dean then accepting his presence. Dean attempts to take care of Dodo and in several speeches at the end of the play decries the viciousness of gang life:

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[85] This is provided by the Suez crisis and the decline of the music hall.

[86] Jellicoe, 'Preface' in *Shelley*, pp.14, 67.

[87] Jellicoe, A., *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, pp.103-104.; *The Knack.*, p.53.

[88] Jellicoe, A., *Shelley*, p.14.

> ...every time anyone does anything cruel or immoral he betrays mankind ... we must try and become better, we must ...help to create order, truth and love. It's so easy to slide into chaos...[89]

His values are ultimately shown to be worthless, however, by his attempt at physical control of Greta after she refuses to listen to him. When he is overpowered by her, Steve metamorphoses into Greta's lover Pampinato, and the victory of violence over Dean's humanism is complete.

From these necessarily brief notes on Jellicoe's stagecraft it is evident that her connection to the Royal Court has perhaps hindered a more widespread appreciation of her works. Noticeably different to New Wave writers such as Osborne and Wesker in technique, her studied lack of contextuality and her wedding of stage activity with dialogue to convey a play's action suggest that Jellicoe is intriguingly similar in approach to another writer of the period, whose initiation of a new paradigm in opposition to West End theatre is the subject of the next section, Harold Pinter.

4.3 The Birthday Party*: Birth of a Paradigm*

> The first key to unlocking *The Birthday Party* is to remember its roots in the popular culture of its day ... this is the [play] that most obviously bears the stamp of the thrillers and comedies of its day ... The faintly maniacal fugitive, the interventionist authority figures, the cliché-toting working-class figures: these were the very stuff of 1950s theatre.[90]

Harold Pinter's stage career began, like John Osborne's, acting in provincial reps. His first full-length play *The Birthday Party* was produced at the Lyric Hammersmith only two years after Osborne's first, and unsurprisingly given the similarity of their theatrical backgrounds and contemporaneity in turning to playwriting, both derived inspiration from similar sources: the plays in which they acted, and the other theatrical entertainments available in the seaside towns in which they worked. Pinter derives much of his early plot structure, as well as other elements of stagecraft, from West End theatre, blending in elements of characterisation, language use and

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[89] Jellicoe, *The Sport of My Mad Mother*, p.164. See also pp.114, 125, 115ff., 127-128, 143, 155-156, 159ff.

[90] Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, p.76.

stagecraft from vaudeville and the actor-managers with whom he began his acting career. The influence of the plays in which Pinter acted upon elements of the storylines of his plays, such as the playing of the drum in *The Birthday Party* being inspired by Priestley's *Mr Kettle and Mrs Moon*, have been handled in depth by other critics, and I do not propose to repeat their research here.[91] Rather, this section focuses on Pinter's subversion of West End paradigmatic criteria, using it as a means of making strange to an audience the very conventions of what it is to know the 'reality' of a theatrical world, and by extension, the 'reality' of reality itself.

> If you press me for a definition, I'd say that what goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism.[92]

The plot of *The Birthday Party* is rather baldly described by most critics as being of a traditional three act 'well-made' structure; little more is said in explanation or expansion of this observation. This is unfortunate, as Pinter's usage of this form of structure begins to indicate the extent to which his acting experience impacted upon many aspects of his early playwriting. In an early interview (1961) Pinter remarks that his experiences in provincial repertory undoubtedly influenced his writing.

> Yes, my experience as an actor has influenced my plays ... I think I certainly developed some feeling for construction which, believe it or not, is important to me...[93]

In a later interview Pinter elaborated on the structure that he considered most pleasing.

> I *am* a very traditional playwright ... For me everything has to do with shape, structure, and over-all unity.[94]

In most of his early work up to *The Homecoming* Pinter uses some of the principles of well-made plays as a structure upon which to hang his subversion of naturalist characterisation and language use. This basic tenet

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[91] I refer the reader to Thompson, *Pinter: the Player's Playwright*; and Smith, L., 'Pinter the Player' in Gale, ed., *Critical Essays on Harold Pinter*, pp.230-243.

[92] Pinter, H., 'Writing for Myself' in *Plays Two*, London, 1991, p.ix.

[93] Pinter, 'Writing for Myself', p.vii. Peter Hall describes *The Birthday Party* as "too bound by its own naturalism: you know, the three-act structure, the French's acting edition set." (Hall, P., 'Directing Pinter', *Theatre Quarterly*, 4.16, p.4.)

[94] L. Bensky, 'Harold Pinter' in Marowitz & Trussler, *op.cit.*, p.109.

of the well made play, unity of action, is very much in evidence in *The Birthday Party*. A man living at a seaside boarding house is alarmed at the anticipated arrival of two new lodgers. These men duly arrive, and after torturing/interrogating him, take him away. The dominance of this plotline can be seen on the graphical representation of the play in Figure 4.1. Though very few stage events need actually be included on the main plotline involving the Removal of Stanley, the vast majority of the events of the play, particularly those events in Acts 1 and 3 that are not integral parts of that plotline are related by extension.[95] For example, Stanley's talk with Lulu in Act 1 and subsequent apparent attempt to attack her in Act 2 are relevant to the main plotline in that they provide important information on Stanley's emotional state. The talk with Lulu occurs immediately after Meg has informed Stanley of the arrival of the "two gentlemen", and his suggestion of them running away together exhibits the anxious impulsiveness of a man trapped.

> Stanley: (*abruptly*) How would you like to go away with me?
> Lulu: Where.
> Stanley: Nowhere. Still, we could go.
> Lulu: But where could we go?
> Stanley: Nowhere. There's nowhere to go. So we could just go.[96]

At the party, Lulu makes sexual advances to Goldberg, effectively making her complicit in the destruction of Stanley, and his apparent attack upon her can then be seen as a form of resistance against Goldberg's subjugation. Lulu's disillusionment with Goldberg the following morning is both a feeble attempt at resistance – "I've seen everything that's happened. I know what's going on" – and the inevitable rejection that follows when a pawn has outlived its usefulness.[97] Pinter also adopts the Ibsenite technique of building tension leading to strong curtain lines or actions at the end of each Act. For

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[95] Pinter, H., 'Letter to Peter Wood' in *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics 1948-1998*, London, 1998, p.8; also Fischer, A., 'Poetry and Drama: Pinter's Play *The Birthday Party* in the Light of His Poem "A View of the Party"', *English Studies*, 60:1/6 (1979), p.484. Richard Schechner describes each event in Pinter's plays as being "organically" related to all others, creating a structural completeness. See Schechner, R., 'Puzzling Pinter', *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 11 no. 2, Winter 1966, p.177.

[96] Pinter, H., *The Birthday Party* in *Plays One*, p.20. (Hereafter referred to as *TBP*)

[97] *ibid.*, pp.74-75.

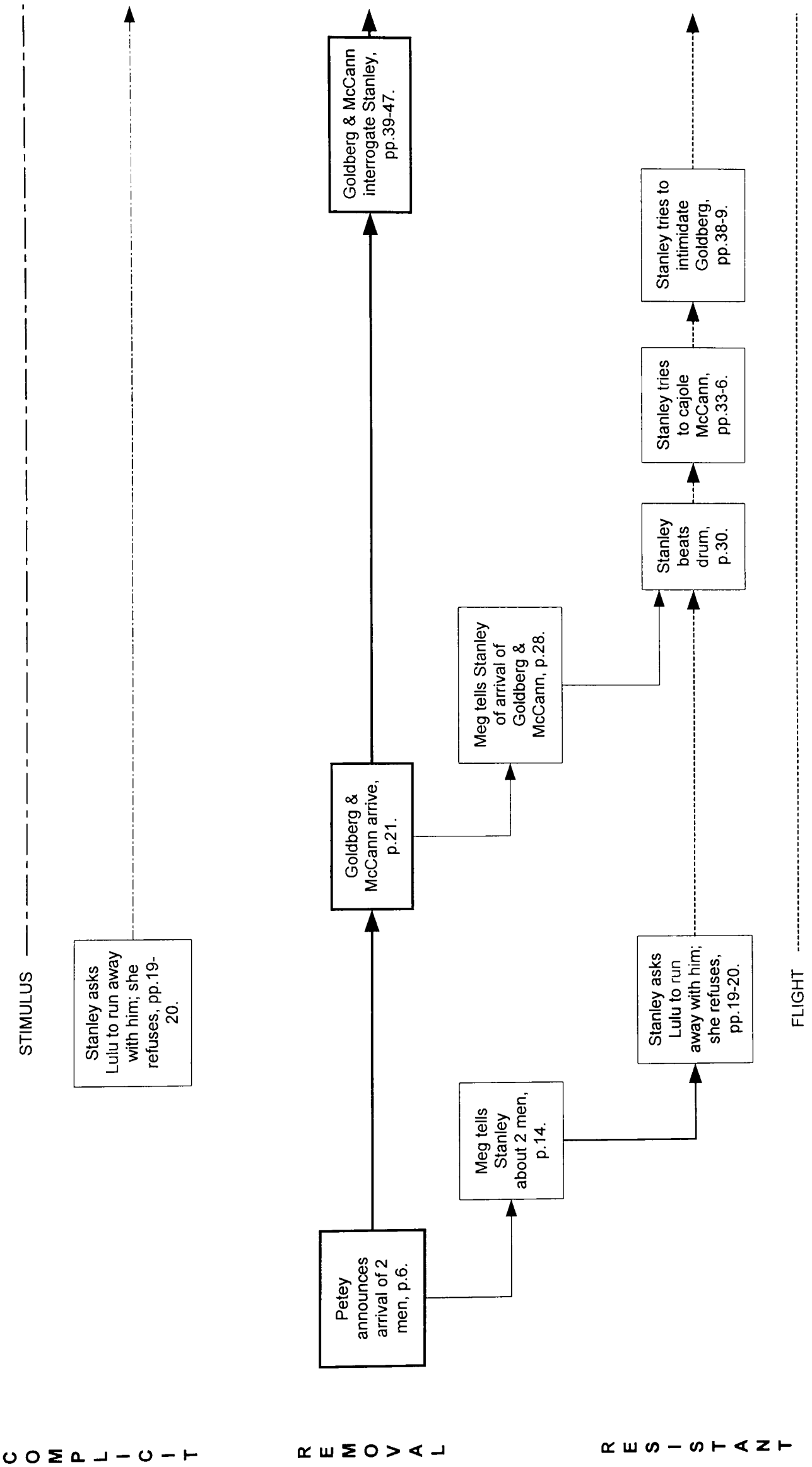

Figure 4.1a Plot diagram of *The Birthday Party*, Act 1.

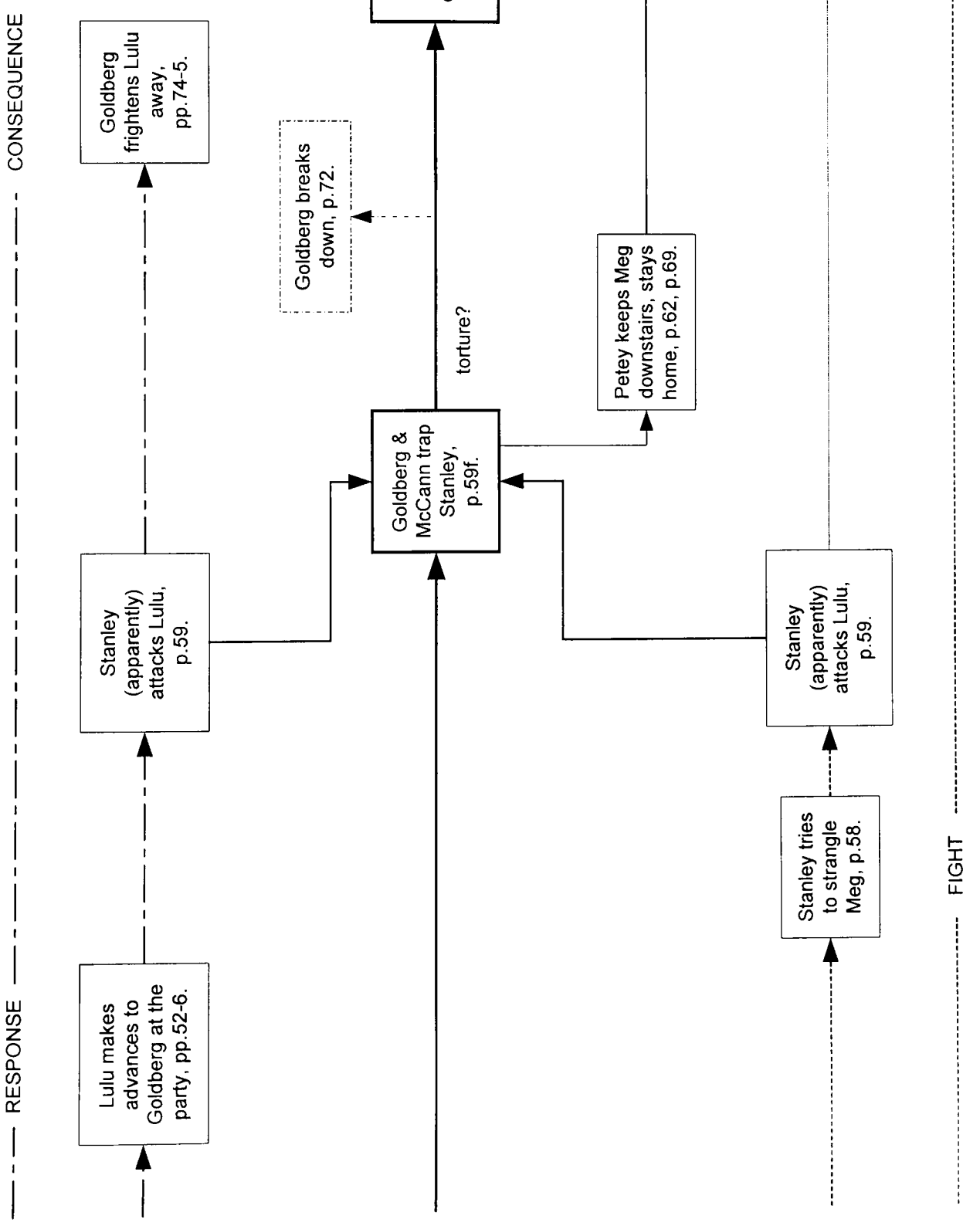

Figure 4.1b Plot diagram of *The Birthday Party*, Act 2.

example, in Act 1 the appearance of the promised strangers Goldberg and McCann is followed by Meg's announcement of their arrival to Stanley and his obvious anxiety at the news. Meg then insists that it is his birthday, and his denial of this, and the forced acceptance of the toy drum as a present, increases Stanley's anxiety and anger, and his frenzied beating of the drum indicates to the audience a promise of terrors to come in the next act.[98] Similarly, Pinter, like Christie, uses the detective play convention of neatly placed blackouts to great effect as a means of building audience interest and excitement at the climax of an act. In *The Mousetrap* at the end of the first act Christie uses a blackout to give added shock to the murder of Mrs Boyle. Placing Mrs Boyle alone onstage, Christie creates a neat anti-climax in which the radio programme she is listening to suggests the danger of a door opening, and Mrs Boyle is startled by an opened door only to exclaim "Oh, it's you" in relief. The intruder turns off the lights, and the radio volume is turned to maximum, thus depriving the audience of both the sight and most of the sound of her murder. When the stage is relit, the audience are given only moments to view the body before the curtain falls.[99] Similarly, in *The Birthday Party* Pinter calls for an extended blackout beginning as Stanley is pulled away from Meg. When Lulu screams, therefore, the audience do not know what has happened to her, although Stanley's involvement is indicated by the rat-a-tat on the drum immediately beforehand. When McCann's torch finally shines upon Stanley, the audience is only able to see a glimpse of Lulu on the table before Stanley backs away, followed by McCann and the torchlight.[100] In both plays the playwright takes advantage of the audience's imagination, creating an enjoyable sensation of anxiety by denying sight of the actual stage events. Additionally, the sensational tableau revealed when McCann shines his torch on Stanley and Lulu closely matches techniques used in other plays by Christie, such as *And Then There Were None*, where

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[98] *ibid.*, pp.28-30. For Pinter's recognition of his utilisation of this traditional playwrighting technique, see Bensky, *op.cit.*, p.109.

[99] Christie, *The Mousetrap*, pp.326-327.

[100] Pinter, *TBP*, pp.58-60.

the end of an act is marked by the discovery of a corpse in just such a sparsely lit setting.[101]

It is with the adaptation of another criterion commonly used in the detective play that Pinter begins the process of subverting a West End representation of reality and making strange the concept of reality itself. In *The Birthday Party* as in other early plays, Pinter learns from the Christie technique of creating a context for the play's action which is isolated from external influence. In *The Mousetrap* the characters staying at Monkswell Manor are forced to remain enclosed in the house with a murderer as a result of heavy snowfalls and a disconnected telephone: not only are they unable to leave, they are unable to contact anyone for assistance. In *The Birthday Party* the sense of isolation is not so obviously accountable, as the audience learns early in the play that Meg and Petey run a boarding house, and that they regularly go out to work and shop. However, like the eponymous space in the earlier *The Room*, Meg's boarding house, and especially the living room, functions both as womb and tomb, as it is the place where Stanley is nurtured and destroyed, and in both cases enclosed.[102] Stanley's refusal to leave the house until forced to by the arrival of Goldberg and McCann emphasises the sense of enclosure that the house engenders. This sense of enclosure and isolation is, perhaps counter-intuitively, emphasised by the mobility of the other characters. Though Lulu, Petey and Meg enter and leave the house a number of times, there is little in the script that connects their movements to any kind of reality outside the house. It is 'nice' outside, there is a new show at the Palace, and Lady Mary Splatt has had a baby, but the lack of specificity or (in the case of Lady Mary Splatt) the sheer unlikelihood of these details themselves lend an air of unreality to the setting.[103]

The 'unreality' of any exterior contextuality places a heightened emphasis upon the environment that is visible to the audience, and the characters' relationship to it. The strength of the connection between characters'

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[101] Thompson, *op.cit.*, p.46; Christie, *And Then There Were None* in *The Mousetrap and Other Plays*, p.67.

[102] Schroll, H.T., *Harold Pinter: A Study of his Reputation (1958-1969)*, Metuchen, 1971, p.6.

[103] Peacock, D.K., *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*, Westport, 1997, p.63.

physical environment and their psychological state, notable in naturalist plays such as *Miss Julie*, is particularly strong in Pinter's early plays. Both Meg in *The Birthday Party* and Rose in *The Room* are remarkable for the degree to which their identities are bound together with the rooms which they inhabit. Meg reminds both the other characters and the audience many times that her boarding house is "on the list"; Rose's psychological destabilisation is achieved in part through the threat of being evicted from the room with which she is clearly emphasised as having a suffocatingly close identification:

> If they ever ask you, Bert, I'm quite happy where I am. We're quiet, we're all right... we're not bothered. And nobody bothers us.[104]

Indeed, *The Room* provides a prime example of a play in which the plot is derived through the interactions of characters that are emergent from environmental pressures. For example, the uncertain relationship between Rose and Mr Kidd is marked first by her misapprehensions of his life in the house - he denies having female domestic help or that his bedroom was ever situated at the back of the house – and thence by his apparent desire to appropriate Rose's rocking chair and deny his ownership of the armchair in the room. Even the furniture is placed at stake in the uneasy power battles between landlord and tenant.[105] The Sands' arrival at Rose's room, and also Riley's, are remarkable for Rose's emphasis upon their movement from the darkness and dampness of the hallway and basement into the warmth of her room. The irony of both plays is that the claims made for the environments are – to the audience's perception – false. Meg may boast of her house being 'on the list', but the breakfasts provided for Pete and Stanley are comically meagre. Similarly, Rose may enter into refrains on the warmth and superiority of her room, but Pinter's stage directions indicate that the room isn't as cosy as she suggests: "*She wraps her cardigan about her;*" "*She goes to the bed, puts on a shawl...*"[106] However, whether or not the warmth of the room is actual, Rose perceives it to be the case; it is a commodity which Rose

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[104] Pinter, *The Room* in *Plays One*, p.87. See also p.102.

[105] *ibid.*, pp.90-91.

[106] *ibid.*, pp.88, 95.

possesses and which other characters either wish to plunder - the Sands by laying claim to the room – or divest her of its privileges, as Riley may be attempting by enticing her to leave with him. The creation of such ironies between character perceptions and their environments marks the beginning of Pinter's efforts at the subversion of West End techniques and criteria.

Original estimations of Pinter's work placed him outside of the political activism his contemporary playwrights seemed to espouse, for while Osborne wrote about Suez and Wesker about blackshirts, and Arden created an entire social and political milieu in which to house Sergeant Musgrave, Pinter's plays by contrast seemed almost entirely divorced from any societal context, as we have already noted. Though Pinter's own remarks originally seemed to confirm the opinion that his work was essentially dealing with personal struggles, in an interview with Lawrence Bensky his position was clarified in this revealing passage:

> I'll tell you what I really think about politicians. The other night I watched some politicians on television talking about Vietnam. I wanted very much to burst through the screen with a flame-thrower and burn their eyes out ... and then inquire from them how they would assess this action from a political point of view.[107]

Here Pinter draws a distinction between party political jostling, with which he professes boredom, and more fundamental issues involving human rights and the fight for equality and justice for all citizenry. It is in this light that Pinter's work is perhaps best viewed. Pinter's work arises from a period in history dominated by the Cold War, in an England experiencing its first IRA bomb scares and hoaxes. Pinter himself risked imprisonment for refusing to do his national service.[108] *The Birthday Party* and his political works of the 1980s dramatise similar acts of individual nonconformism and their consequences. Using a far smaller canvas than Wesker or Arden, Pinter creates without recourse to their emphasis on societal milieu plays which

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[107] Pinter quoted in Bensky, *op.cit.*, p.104. Martin Esslin takes the contrary view, preferring to see Pinter's work as an exploration of problems of the self, involving a process of adjustments in order to come to terms with reality. See Esslin, M., *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p.262. See also Peacock, *op.cit.*, p.63f.

[108] Pinter quoted in Knowles, *Understanding Harold Pinter*, Columbia, 1995, p.183. See also Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, pp.21-24 for a full account of the Kafka-esque experience of the tribunals that handled Pinter's case.

ultimately can be seen to dramatise similar concerns, that is, the conflict between the individual and authoritarian society. The set of *The Birthday Party* is the site of a microcosm of this fundamental conflict: Stanley is the individual fighting for his freedom against Goldberg and McCann, representatives of authority, with emphasis placed upon the subtle power plays which make up the battle between the parties. It is this battle which Pinter highlighted in a letter to the play's original director, Peter Wood:

> We've agreed; the hierarchy, the Establishment ... arrive to effect alteration and censure upon a member of the club who has discarded responsibility ... towards himself and others ... [Stanley] does possess, however, for my money, a certain fibre – he fights for his life.[109]

Though the audience has no clear idea who Stanley is (allegedly a pianist), what it is he has done, or even who exactly Goldberg and McCann work for and why they are so interested in Stanley, the course of the plot and the language used by the characters indicate that Goldberg and McCann are definitely intended to represent authority, even though the source of their authority is never stated. Goldberg's continual references to his family and his family's business interests implicitly ally him with authority, as do the frequently authoritarian references uttered by him and McCann during the interrogation scene in Act 2; for example, "When did you last wash up a cup?" "When did you last pray?" and "Is the number 846 possible or necessary?" associate the interrogators in turn with the family, the Church, and with philosophical discourse.[110] Though initial audience members and critics may have belittled the lack of a specific context or character background information in the play, Pinter wishes to suggest that none of these details are necessary for a complete understanding of his play.[111] Pinter is interested not in the specifics of one particular case of the subjugation of the individual

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[109] Pinter, 'On *The Birthday Party* I' in *Various Voices*, p.11.See also Sykes, A., *Harold Pinter*, St. Lucia, 1972, p.7; Billington, *op.cit.*, p.77;, Gussow, M., *Conversations With Pinter*, New York, 1994, p.69.

[110] Pinter, *TBP*, pp.43-44.

[111] Ronald Knowles suggests that audiences in 1958 may have related the events of the play to the contemporaneous outbreak of IRA bombings. Knowles, *Understanding Harold Pinter*, pp.35-37.

by society, but in the processes by which such a subjugation is carried out, and in the audience's participation in the examination of these processes.

> A play is not an essay ... To supply an explicit moral tag to an evolving and compulsive dramatic image seems to me facile, impertinent and dishonest. Where this takes place it is not theatre but a crossword puzzle ...[112]

Pinter's excision of extraneous plot and character information also has implications for the language use and dialogue in his plays, as Esslin notes:

> Pinter has given us added insight into ... the fact that traditional stage dialogue has always greatly overestimated the degree of logic which governs the use of language ... People on the stage have, from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Rattigan, always spoken more clearly, more... to the purpose than they would ever have done in real life.[113]

Rattigan and Christie both used characters' dialogue as an explicit carrier for information considered essential to the plot, as well as for the explication of relationships between characters. For example, Christie tells at length the story of the Longridge Farm incident in order to provide a motivation for the murder later in the play, while in *The Deep Blue Sea* Rattigan uses Collyer as the sounding-board through which the audience hears the story of the beginning of Hester's relationship with Freddie.[114] Pinter's move away from this form of dramatic technique is symptomatic of a more general metamorphosis of the conception of 'character' in his plays when compared to those of the West End paradigm. Characterisation in West End theatre derives many of its ideas of function from naturalist drama, as discussed last chapter; even in what may be considered the relatively 'weak' English form of naturalism, the audience's experience of a character may be said to be mediated through questions of environment and, to a limited extent, heredity. In Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea*, for example, it was noted that the impetus of the plot involving Hester's response to emotional turmoil is to a great degree provided through Rattigan's elaboration of her character as

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[112] Pinter, 'On *The Birthday Party* II' in *Various Voices*, p.15. See also Esslin, M., *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p.242; Beckerman, B., 'The Artifice of "Reality" in Chekhov and Pinter', *Modern Drama*, 21(1978), pp.155, 158; Beckerman describes the urge to explicate and add background information to Pinter's characters and situations as a function of disorientation and "cultural limitation."

[113] Esslin, M., *Pinter: the Playwright*, 5th ed., London, 1992, p.226.

[114] Christie, *The Mousetrap*, pp.316-317; Rattigan, *DBS*, pp.336-338.

being a product of both her past and present physical and moral environments. Through this presentation of her character, Rattigan intends that the audience should be able to come to a comprehensive psychological understanding of Hester; that is, that we as an audience have been given all necessary information to come to view her as a quasi-independent psychological entity worthy of empathetic reactions.[115] Pinter shies away from such presentations of character as a "concrete unitary ego," the first of his changes to the technical aspects of characterisation being to shatter the knowability of the characters by excising the verifiable factual detail that others like Rattigan used to develop a sense of a character's heredity and environment.

> A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things.[116]

In comparison with the West End realism of the characterisations of Christie and Rattigan, Pinter's sketching of the relationship between Meg and Petey is remarkably free of factual and verifiable information. That they are married, that Petey is a deckchair attendant, and that Meg runs a boarding house are details gradually revealed in the first 10 minutes of the play, but no clue is given as to how long they have been married, where they met, and so on. The state of their relationship is, however, revealed to the audience in a short exchange at the very beginning of the play:

> Meg: I've got your cornflakes ready .... Here's your cornflakes .... Are they nice?
> Petey: Very nice.
> Meg: I thought they'd be nice.[117]

In these few lines is captured the banality and emptiness of a long-standing relationship that has gone stale. In the repetitiveness of her phraseology we understand that Meg acts as attentive mother-figure to Petey, who in his

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[115] The character is a quasi-independent psychological entity because, no matter how accomplished the performance, the audience will always be in possession of a programme to remind them of the identity of the actor/actress playing the role.

[116] Pinter, 'On *The Birthday Party* II' in *Various Voices*, p.15. See also Knowles, *Understanding Harold Pinter*, pp.16, 127, 206.

[117] Pinter, *TBP*, p.3.

reply to Meg permits but not encourages her matriarchal ministrations.[118] Without the provision of an extra character included in the action as the sounding-board for the audience, and minus minutes of expository dialogue, Pinter here takes advantage of a skill most humans generally exercise regularly, honed eavesdropping in restaurants and other public places, and encourages the audience to impute or intuit the motivations and relationships of individuals via verbal and physical indicators.

Pinter was originally accused, like David Mamet, of having a 'tape-recorder ear' and of creating dialogue through the simple transcription of overheard conversations.[119] However, the short section of *The Birthday Party* quoted above involving Petey's cornflakes demonstrates that Pinter's work is rather more carefully structured than most ordinary conversation: the subtle variations of wording around the repetition of 'nice' create a particular rhythmic pattern which provides another verbal indicator to the audience of Meg and Petey's humdrum relationship. This brand of structuring is developed in such passages as the interrogation scene into what F.J. Bernhard describes as 'suprarealism'; that is, they create a pattern of language which begins to "transcend realism."[120] The by turns petty and outlandish accusations that Goldberg and McCann fling at Stanley break through the conventions of verisimilitude demanded by 'naturalistic' West End dialogue:

> Goldberg: Where is your lechery leading you?
> ...
> Goldberg: You stuff yourself with dry toast.
> McCann: You contaminate womankind.
> Goldberg: Why don't you pay the rent?[121]

Christie's murderer is given the motivation of an abused childhood as the motivation behind his actions, and his victims placed as innocent participators in that childhood. By contrast, Stanley's 'crimes' seem to be a bizarre form of gluttony and tardiness in paying bills. This extract

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[118] Esslin, *op.cit.*, pp.231-232.

[119] Kennedy, *op.cit.*, p.169; Bernhard, F.J., 'Beyond Realism: the Plays of Harold Pinter', *Modern Drama*, 8(1965), p.185.

[120] Bernhard, *op.cit.*, p.186.

[121] Pinter, *TBP*, p.45. See also Kennedy, *op.cit.*, pp.169-170; Beckerman, *op.cit.*, p.154.

demonstrates the way in which Pinter has created a linguistic parallel to his excision of contextual detail from his characterisations and plots. The crimes with which Stanley is accused are by no means those which in an everyday world would be troubling in any respect, but the way in which they are compounded into a litany of villainy conveys to the audience the seriousness of Stanley's predicament without having to resort to any concrete details of criminality. Pinter enables Goldberg and McCann to intimidate their victim with a unique brand of verbal violence which neatly complements his structural changes to character and plot.[122] The following chapter examines in greater detail the ways in which Pinter creates new conventions of stage language use in such exchanges as that quoted above.

On occasion Pinter's characters do tell other characters stories about themselves and their past experiences, as when Stanley tells Meg about his piano recitals, or Goldberg reminisces about his wife, mother and uncle. However, unlike the retelling of the Longridge Farm incident or of Hester's relationship with Freddie Page, these stories are in no way intended to be taken as trustworthy or factual, as Pinter has emphasised in relation to the character Aston in *The Caretaker*:

> ... Aston opened his mouth ... I had no axe to grind there. And the one thing that people have missed is that it isn't necessary to conclude that everything Aston says about his experiences in the mental hospital is true.[123]

Pinter here makes two interrelated points. The first point is that Pinter brought no political agenda to bear in Aston's story; rather, the story arose directly from the impetus of character development. Pinter's second point is that the veracity of Aston's story is not important to the development of his character or the plot as a whole. Even if the story is false, it reveals much about Aston's personal beliefs and motivations, and makes important changes in the relationship between Aston and Davies.[124] Goldberg's reminiscences function in a similar manner. As already noted, Goldberg

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[122] Visser, D., 'Communicating Torture: The Dramatic Language of Harold Pinter', *Neophilologus*, 80 (1996), pp.329, 331.

[123] Pinter quoted in Bensky, *op.cit.*, p.105.

[124] e.g. Pinter, H., *The Caretaker* in *Plays Two*, pp.65-67.

bolsters his authoritativeness by allying himself linguistically with other authoritarian institutions in the interrogation scene. His monologues perform a similar feat by emphasising Goldberg's respectability, though embedded in their content are hints that they may not be entirely truthful.

> So I'd give her [the Sunday school teacher] a peck and I'd bowl back home. Humming away I'd be, past the children's playground. I'd tip my hat to the toddlers, I'd give a helping hand to a couple of stray dogs, everything came natural ... The sun falling behind the dog stadium...[125]

The lack of contextual detail and the unreliability of character's discussion of themselves, as demonstrated in the above quote, make an important impact upon the way in which actors and directors construct interpretations of the play's characters. Traditionally actors rely upon the information in the text for clues as to the way their characterisation should progress. R.L. Benedetti lists these sources as being explicit information, for example, that Hamlet is 30 and a university student; hearsay; and information implied by the play's action, such as Hamlet's physical adeptness, implied in his competence in the final fight scene.[126] Pinter's excision of the first two of Benedetti's categories from *The Birthday Party* evidently caused difficulties for the original production of the play, evidenced by Pinter's extant letter to director Peter Wood, who had evidently written to Pinter requesting clarification of the plot, theme and characters. Alan Ayckbourn also tells an anecdote relating to his early years as an actor in Scarborough. When rehearsing an early production of *The Birthday Party*, he met Pinter and requested assistance with his character's biography. Pinter's response was, according to Ayckbourn, to push up his glasses and say 'Mind your own fucking business!'[127] Such a refusal to be explicit forces the actor and director to concentrate far more upon the language and dialogue of the play as sources

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[125] Pinter, *The Birthday Party*, p.37. Andrew Kennedy describes Goldberg's speeches as a parody of the 'culture-patter' of the Successful Head of Family and Business; see Kennedy, *op.cit.*, p.181. Interestingly, though many critics have noted the copious Jewish references in Goldberg's monologues, no-one to my knowledge has noticed the oddity of Goldberg, who in these passages attempts to portray himself as a conscientious practising Jew, walking out with a Sunday school teacher – a Gentile. This juxtaposition alone places doubt upon Goldberg's account of himself.

[126] Benedetti, R.L., *The Director at Work*, Englewood Cliffs, 1985, p.57.

[127] Pinter in Gussow, *Conversations With Pinter*, pp.111-112. Also Moss, S., 'Under the Volcano', *The Guardian*, Saturday section, September 4 1999, p.6.

for interpretation, a situation which creates a playscript rather more open to interpretation than either West End paradigm or New Wave plays. The ways in which this openness becomes evident in Pinter's work, and the resultant implications for the interpretation and performance of the plays will be discussed in the next two chapters.

Another major means by which Pinter subverts naturalism in his theatre is through the introduction of elements of popular theatre forms into his superficially naturalistic structure. Many critics, including Ronald Knowles and D.K. Peacock, have noted elements of the music hall, variety acts and Hollywood movie gangsters in his characters. Goldberg and McCann (and Ben and Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*) are descendants of a long line of gangster duos, one partner shrewd and domineering, the other subservient and probably more violent, that can be seen in any number of gangster films over the decades, and even in more contemporary works as diverse as Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* and Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. Goldberg is dominant: it is he who asks for McCann's presence at the house, it is he that organises the birthday party and initiates the interrogation, but it is McCann who must remain with Stanley overnight while Goldberg entertains Lulu.[128] Michael Billington notes that Goldberg and McCann are not only descendants of the gangster duos, but also of the vaudeville cross-talk comedy acts that were particularly popular in the 1950s. He and Peacock compare Pinter's duo with such acts as Flanagan and Allen, and Jewel and Warriss, where Flanagan and Jewel were the stooges, and Allen and Warriss the bullying straight men. Billington also recognises a resemblance between the quickfire questioning of the interrogation scene and radio and television quiz shows, in which a bullying host forces contestants to answer as many questions as possible in sixty seconds.[129] The significance of Pinter's use of the music hall in his plays lies in the subtlety with which it is integrated into the more naturalistic elements of the play. Leslie Smith emphasises that, though 'legitimate' and 'popular' theatre played in close

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[128] Pinter, *TBP* (1991), pp.23, 26, 41, 67, 74.

[129] Billington, *op.cit.*, p.77; Peacock, *op.cit.*, p.65; Knowles, R., *The Birthday Party and The Caretaker: Text and Performance*, Basingstoke, 1988, p.65; Knowles, R., *Understanding Harold Pinter*, pp.30-32.

geographical proximity, the two forms did not intermingle. While John Osborne made some use of the juxtaposition of the two parallel theatrical modes in his play *The Entertainer*, in *The Birthday Party* Pinter causes them to intersect in the interactions between the vaudeville-inspired characters Goldberg and McCann, and the more naturalistic characters Meg and Petey. Smith suggests that the infiltration of the naturalistic beginning of the play by Goldberg and McCann would have had an unsettling and dislocating effect on a 1958 audience, especially as in the creation of the two strangers Pinter had transformed two stereotypical butts of gags, the Irishman and the Jew, into nightmarish grotesques.[130]

Billington also traces a vaudevillian influence in Pinter's language use, specifically in the structure of some passages of dialogue. Like many classic routines by such comedians as Max Miller, Pinter's dialogue often depends for its effectiveness on a musical patterning and repetition of words which drains them of meaning or sense.

> Meg: Is Stanley up yet?
> Petey: I don't know. Is he?
> Meg: I don't know. I haven't seen him down yet.
> Petey: Well then, he can't be up.
> Meg: Haven't you seen him down?
> Petey: I've only just come in.[131]

In this example, the audience is bombarded by a bewildering preponderance of opposing prepositions – up ... down ... up ... down ... in ... out ... - combined with the repetitions or near repetitions of short phrases – I don't know ... I don't know ... I haven't seen him down ... Haven't you seen him down... By labouring language in paucity, Meg and Petey turn a simple enquiry about Stanley's state of waking into a quasi-musical nonsense.[132]

It seems likely that Pinter's time working with the actor-managers Anew McMaster and Donald Wolfit influenced the characterisation and acting style required in *The Birthday Party*, particularly the part of Goldberg, which like many characters in later Pinter plays demands a particular degree of stage

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[130] Smith, *op.cit.*, pp.234-235.

[131] Pinter, *TBP*, p.4.

[132] Billington, M., *The Modern Actor*, pp.173-175.

presence and assurance, especially in the lengthier monologues. Both Wolfit and McMaster were imposing men, both in voice and stature, and believed in the power of the 'grand manner' of heroic acting. Like other actor-managers before them, Wolfit and McMaster strove continually to maintain their authority as the lead actor of their companies, fulminating against those who questioned their leadership or tried to undercut their performances. The personal magnetism that could be emitted from these performers is indicated by Pinter's recollection of a performance by McMaster of *Othello* in Limerick. With the vast majority of the audience drunk, the cast struggled through the first act, and feared the audience would storm the stage:

> Don't worry, Mac said, don't worry ... When he walked on to the stage for the 'naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm' scene ... they silenced. He tore into the fit ... the audience was quite still. And sober.[133]

As a character Goldberg seems to aspire to this degree of authoritativeness. His monologues about his wife and mother are his opportunity to impose his personality, and thus his authority, upon all other characters present:

> Uncle Barney taught me that the word of a gentleman is enough. That's why, when I had to go away on business I never carried any money. One of my sons used to come with me. He used to carry a few coppers. For a paper, perhaps, to see how the M.C.C. was getting on overseas.[134]

It can be no accident that many performers of the role have either been naturally imposing in voice or stature, such as Pinter himself or Timothy West, or have emphasised this aspect of the character by dress, such as Brewster Mason, or by gesture, as typified by Sydney Tafler.[135] The additional degree of subtlety of characterisation that Pinter demands of actors playing Goldberg is that the character's authority is never as assured as he would wish it to be, a state of affairs indicated by the lack of cohesiveness in his statement of beliefs at the end of the play:

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[133] Pinter, 'Mac' in *Various Voices*, pp.23, 22. Also Thompson, *op.cit.*, pp.8-9, 12.

[134] Pinter, *TBP*, p.22.

[135] Knowles, *op.cit.*, pp.65, 67, 70-71. Timothy West appeared in the 1999 Theatre Royal Bath production of the play; see Clapp, S., '*The Birthday Party* – review', *The Observer*, Arts section, May 9 1999, p.8.

> Follow my mental? Learn by heart. Never write down a thing. And don't go too near the water ... BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD... (*Lost*)[136]

Uneasiness in a position of authority and fearing its being usurped is another quality Pinter may be said to have derived from his exposure to actor-managers. His memoir of McMaster includes an instance in which Mac feels his authority questioned by another actor:

> He undercuts me, he said, he keeps coming in under me. I'm the one who should come under. I'm playing Hamlet ... The bugger wants to play Hamlet himself, that's what it is. But he bloodywell won't while I'm alive.[137]

What Pinter captures in his characterisation of Goldberg is not simply the expansive personality of such figures as McMaster and Wolfit, but the inherent insecurity of their position as lead actor and manager of a touring company of actors. As with McMaster in Pinter's memoir, Goldberg reassures himself of his authority and ability by recounting to others stories that demonstrate that authority. Having that authority even implicitly questioned by a subordinate (in Goldberg's case, a victim) is a matter of not simply concern but of eroded self-esteem.

The Birthday Party has been described as having "Pinter's most photographically real set," and again, Pinter admits to being influenced by the theatre in which he acted.[138] Pinter's description of the set is markedly traditional: "Back door and small window up left. Kitchen hatch, centre back. Kitchen door up right."[139] One can almost imagine this represented diagrammatically in a French's Acting Edition, and indeed, the set by Ralph Koltai of the 1964 Royal Shakespeare Company production of the play is just so pictured.[140] In performance, the audience member would be struck not only by the 'fourth wall' verisimilitude of the set, but also by the sheer

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[136] Pinter, *TBP*, pp.71-72.

[137] Pinter, 'Mac', p.22.

[138] Cohn, R., 'The World of Harold Pinter' in Ganz, A., ed., *Pinter: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood Cliffs, 1972, p.89; Pinter, 'Writing for Myself', pp.vii-viii; Bensky, *op.cit.*, p.100.

[139] Pinter, *TBP*, p.3.

[140] Pinter, H., *The Birthday Party*, London, 1960, p.71. The furniture and property list on pp.72-73 gives a salutary reminder of the sheer quantity of naturalistic clutter directly referred to in the script. See also Smith in Gale, *op.cit.*, p.234.

amount of tableware used, particularly in the opening minutes of the play. Bowls of cornflakes, plates of fried bread, teacups and a teapot all appear, lending a deceptively cosy domestic clutter to the scene. However, Pinter does not merely use such props as set dressing. Pinter's experiences with Wolfit and McMaster also may be seen as the primary influence on another of the hallmarks of his stagecraft: the controlled use of props as a means of explicating characterisation. Where Ibsen used props as a means of generating symbolism in his plays, Pinter seems more interested in utilising and extending upon the economy of gesture which he so admired in Wolfit.[141] He has described the vivid image Wolfit achieved when in *Oedipus at Colonus* he stood well-lit on a rostrum, facing upstage and covered by a cloak:

> ...there came the moment when the man downstage finished his speech and we all knew ... that Wolfit or Oedipus ... was going to turn and speak. He held the moment until one's stomach was truly trembling and the cloak came round; a tremendous swish ... the savagery and power that emerged from such a moment was extraordinary.[142]

Though the technique is more evident in later plays, even in *The Birthday Party* one can see adeptness at the explication of characters and their relationships though the use of props and costume, a talent whose antecedents Pinter himself recognises:

> ...there are comparable moments in what I seem to write. The moments are very exact and even very small, perhaps even trivial – as when a glass is moved from there to there. Now, in my terms I feel that this is a very big moment ... You haven't got the cloak, but you do have the glass.[143]

Such an apparently minor incident as McCann's tearing of newspaper tells the audience much about the character, not only through the act itself, but also through the timing of its occurrences in the action. McCann indulges in this activity twice, both times just prior to verbal assaults on Stanley, when

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[141] In *Hedda Gabler* Ibsen uses Loevborg's manuscript as a symbol of his and Thea's hope in the future: when destroying it Hedda calls it their 'child'. Similarly, General Gabler's pistols are the focus of Hedda's link to her past, and function as symbols of heroism and glory, qualities to which Hedda aspires. See Ibsen, *op.cit.*, p.317; Knight, G.W., *Ibsen*, Edinburgh, 1962, pp.61-63, 65.

[142] Harwood, R., *Sir Donald Wolfit: His Life and Work in the Unfashionable Theatre*, London, 1971, p.224.

[143] Pinter quoted in Lahr, J. & Lahr, A., ed., *A Casebook on Harold Pinter's "The Homecoming"*, London, 1974, p.39. See also Smith, *op.cit.*, p.236.

McCann is presumably preparing himself to assist in the attack. That it is a nervous tic is reinforced for the audience by the response required by the actor to Pinter's extraordinarily precise stage direction "*McCann is sitting at the table tearing a sheet of newspaper into five equal strips.*"[144] This can be seen as not so much a stage direction, but the calculated insertion of a task for the actor to complete in order to achieve a specific audience impression: tearing the newspaper into three or four strips would be less demanding, as it would require less effort from the actor to mentally calculate the correct points to begin tearing. Pinter is evidently asking for a level of concentration from the actor in fulfilling this direction which lends the characterisation of McCann an intensity that would heighten an audience's impression of his anxiety. Though on a totally different scale to Wolfit's effect with the cloak, the tearing of the newspaper achieves the same heights of theatricality with an equal economy of movement and a similar degree of character information conveyed to the audience.

Pinter also utilises a prop in his dramatisation of one of the major character relationships in *The Birthday Party*. The removal, breaking and return of Stanley's spectacles can be seen as the thread which runs through Stanley's interactions with Goldberg and McCann; the removal and destruction of Stanley's glasses seems to equate with the destruction of his opposition and the subjugation of his willpower. Quite early in the first interrogation Stanley's glasses are snatched away, just at the point at which he begins to falter under questioning, and his fumbling attempts to retrieve the glasses from McCann leave him at a distinct disadvantage in the powerplay with his interrogators. Similarly, when his glasses are removed and broken by McCann during the game of blind man's buff in the party scene Stanley is forced into his attack on Meg, as this and other physical obstacles forced in his way prevent him from fighting back in any more meaningful fashion. Significantly, the last coherent sentence Stanley utters is "Could I have my glasses," and after Stanley is led in at the end of the play, even possession of the broken spectacles seems to enable him to attempt some response to the taunts from Goldberg and McCann. The parallel between Stanley's resistance

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[144] Pinter, *TBP*, pp.31, 69; Stanley enters p.75.

to Goldberg and his possession of the spectacles indicates an important feature of Pinter's dramaturgy, discussed next chapter, that there is an equivalence of property and authority in Pinter's work. By taking Stanley's glasses, Goldberg signals his assumption of authority over him.[145]

Perhaps partly a result of his acting experience, Pinter seems able to visually explicate the changing power relationships of his characters through their positions on the stage relative to each other, and frequently to ensure the durability of these visual images in production by writing them into the play's dialogue. Even the inspiration for much of Pinter's work is visual: Pinter has often recounted that the composition of *The Room*, *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker* were prompted by visual tableaux.[146] This heightened spatial awareness can be seen in Act 2 of *The Birthday Party*, where Goldberg, McCann and Stanley have a major disagreement, as Stanley refuses to accede to the other's request that he sit down. [147] Stanley's refusal to sit is an important act of defiance, as to obey Goldberg would be to immediately subjugate his will to his interrogators. While he stands, Stanley has some degree of defence against Goldberg and McCann. Conversely, Goldberg sits down in order to demonstrate his power, as by sitting unbidden by anyone else he not only takes possession of one of the chairs in the room but also indicates to Stanley his high degree of self-assurance, as he has chosen to take a position which is less aggressive. When Stanley later tricks McCann into sitting down, McCann's extreme anger is based not on a childish dislike of being tricked, but on his displeasure at being cheated into the less aggressive sitting position, thereby giving Stanley, now the only one of the three standing, a temporary hint of authoritativeness. Like cats crouched in stalemate over disputed territory in a garden, each of these movements is small but crucially important, as any tactical error by any character may lead to their loss of authority and thence territorial possession. Stanley makes just such an error in forcing Goldberg to stand up:

> Goldberg: Once I'm up I'm up.

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[145] Pinter, *TBP*, pp.78-79. Peacock, *op.cit.*, p.53.

[146] e.g. Pinter, 'Writing for Myself', p.ix; Peacock, *op.cit.*, p.42.

[147]Pinter, *TBP*, p.39f.

> Stanley: Same here.
> McCann: (*moving to Stanley*) You've made Mr Goldberg stand up.
> Stanley: (*his voice rising*) It'll do him good!
> ....
> Goldberg: (*Crossing to him*) Webber. (*Quietly*) SIT DOWN.
> (*Silence. Stanley .... strolls casually to the chair at the table. They watch him .... He sits.*)[148]

Like a guilty feline slowly edging away from larger and more aggressive opponents, after Goldberg's threat Stanley has no option but to back away as casually as possible in order to salvage some authoritativeness. Unlike felines however, who fight over specific areas of territory in suburban back gardens, the territorial component of such battles is entirely unimportant. There is nothing more material to the power wielded and acceded in these conflicts than the display of the power itself. Goldberg may force Stanley to sit down, but the victory is only temporary as he has won nothing material that may be guarded and defended. Goldberg's insecurity as evinced in such speeches as "I believe that the world" stems from this inherent insubstantiality of his authority. Goldberg may enjoy a certain theatricality in the operations of authority, as in his expansive monologues on his Jewish background, but as with all theatrical forms, Goldberg's ability to rejoice in his power is ultimately ephemeral, its insubstantiality underlined by Stanley's silent rebellion at the end of the play.

The above passage from *The Birthday Party* is also one of the more notable areas in which Pinter may be seen to be making a metatheatrical comment upon the acting, writing and set dressing conventions of the West End paradigm. As with a similar passage in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, in which Pozzo worries about finding a suitably face-saving way to resume sitting having stood up prior to leaving, the game-playing of Goldberg, McCann and Stanley make an ironic comment upon the propensity of West End writers to use middle class manners as a means of creating characterisation. In *The Deep Blue Sea* Hester gains control of a room full of people immediately after being saved from suicide via scrupulous good manners, while it is the lack of manners of many of the house guests in *The Mousetrap* that makes them

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[148] *ibid.*, p.41.

suspicious both to the Ralstons and the audience.[149] The juggling of breakfast plates and cups early in the play may similarly be seen as a working-class ironic rendering of the stereotypical image of a du Maurier-esque figure manipulating a cigarette holder and a whisky tumbler.[150]

Ironically, it was perhaps the similarity of the production methods of the premiere of *The Birthday Party* to West End practice that aided its initial downfall. Produced as a commercial venture by Michael Codron, the play followed the traditional West End procedure of out-of-town try-outs (in Cambridge, Wolverhampton and Oxford; the play was generally well-received) followed by a run in the Lyric Hammersmith, Tennents' traditional try-out house for untested work.[151] There were two fundamental flaws in this choice of theatre. The first was pure poor luck – Harold Hobson did not attend the opening night, and Codron felt unable to keep the play open in the face of the vitriolic reviews the play had received from all other quarters. The second flaw relates directly to these poor reviews: being the Tennents' try-out house, both the Lyric's audience and the newspaper critics were accustomed to seeing West End work produced there. *The Birthday Party* was not West End work. The critics did not see what they had expected, and worse, saw an example of mould-breaking work that, in Billington's opinion, "got ritually slaughtered:"

> Pinter's play – a rep thriller with political resonance – was gloriously uncategorisable and, in a way, he had paid the price.[152]

The wider significance in paradigmatic terms of this kind of critical reaction to Pinter's work is discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Its immediate significance, however, lies in the aftermath of the play's short run. As Jellicoe noted, box office success was the key to a playwriting career; Pinter suffered a box office disaster, but only three years later had a major success with *The Caretaker*. There are two reasons for this remarkable reversal of fortune. The

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[149] Beckett, S., *Waiting for Godot* in The *Complete Dramatic Works*, London, 1990, p.28f.; e.g. Christie, *The Mousetrap*, p.293.

[150] Characters in *The Mousetrap* juggle cigarettes and magazines rather than drinks or plates; see Christie, *The Mousetrap*, pp.306-307.

[151] Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, p.84.

[152] *ibid.*, p.86.

first was Codron's continued support for Pinter, using his sketches in a revue in 1959, and producing *The Caretaker* in spite of his personal misgivings.[153] More importantly, however, Pinter's work was commissioned and broadcast on radio and television, not only providing him with an income and writing experience, but a far larger audience than he could ever have hoped to have reached with *The Birthday Party*. *A Slight Ache* was broadcast on the Third Programme in 1959 and *A Night Out* in 1960, the latter gaining a respectable Appreciation index of 65. When *A Night Out* was subsequently produced for television as part of ABC's *Armchair Theatre*, it reached number 1 in the week's ratings.[154] The popular appeal of Pinter's radio and television work – in the face of lukewarm reviews – seems to have had a similar effect upon the box office of Pinter's stage work as it did for Osborne when a televised extract of *Look Back in Anger* vastly improved the houses of the play's second run. The broadcasts enabled Pinter to reach a new audience who didn't attend West End theatre, and who had grown used to work that did not obey West End criteria regarding character and plot.[155] Writing for 'popular' media also enabled Pinter to reach an audience without any critical mediation. At the time it was not technologically possible to provide television reviewers in particular with tapes of programmes prior to broadcast; reviewers had to watch the programme they wished to review at the same time as the rest of the audience, and publish their critique after the broadcast. The reviews were thus simply not able to sway audience reaction in the same way as theatre reviews: television reviews could not determine what a reader decided to see, only potentially colour their opinions of what they had seen well after the event. Pinter was thus able to build an audience base largely separate from critical opinion, and gained the opportunity to fine tune his dramatic technique simultaneously, a major step away from the desperate quest for box office success that characterised the playwright's lot in the West End paradigm.

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[153] *ibid.*, pp.107, 126.

[154] Carpenter, H., *The Envy of the World*, London, 1996, pp.209-210; Billington, *op.cit.*, p.111.

[155] In its early days television was frequently seen as a quasi-socialist and cross-cultural force. Potter, D., *Seeing the Blossom*, London, 1994, p.55; Carpenter, H., *Dennis Potter: the Authorized Biography*, London, 1998, p.46.

5. The Pinter Paradigm I

> I do so hate the becauses of drama. Who are we to say that this happened because that happened, that one thing is a consequence of another? ... Life is more mysterious than plays make it out to be.[1]

In the last chapter Pinter's *The Birthday Party* was posited as an examplar of a play written in a period of crisis: while it exhibited some characteristics of the West End paradigm in elements of its structure and characterisation, it also reached beyond the boundaries of that paradigmatic structure in other areas of its stagecraft, particularly in its language use, construction of dramatic situation and physical use of the stage. This chapter expands upon the earlier discussion of those excursions from the West End paradigmatic structure, using a selection of Pinter's better known works to provide examples. Despite the fact that *The Collection, Old Times, The Homecoming, Betrayal* and *One for the Road* are usually considered more for the differences in their stagecraft and thematic concerns by critics,[2] in this chapter I wish to highlight their similarities in approach to character, plot structure, language and staging, demonstrating that Pinter has retained a consistency of technique over the years constituting a development upon the innovations we have already noted in *The Birthday Party*, and forming constituent criteria substantially different from other contemporary theatre forms. The following chapter, Chapter 6, follows on from the study of paradigmatic playscript constituents of this chapter, and examines the way in which Pinter's work

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[1] Pinter quoted in Hinchcliffe, *Harold Pinter*, Boston, 1981, p.131.

[2] This is indicated by the way in which most critics divide their works along roughly chronological lines, ascribing titles to each category based upon their impression of the common subject matter of the works. Thus Sykes, Gale, and Peacock all group together the early plays using Wardle's phrase 'comedies of menace'; Trussler describes *The Collection, The Lover* and *The Homecoming* as 'love chases', *Silence, Landscape* and *Old Times* are described as 'memory plays' by Gale, Dukore and Peacock, while *One for the Road, Mountain Language* and *Party Time* are grouped together as political plays by Peacock. The lasting nature of these categorisations can be seen by the publication dates of the books by the above authors: the oldest was published in 1970, the newest in 1997. See Dukore, B.F., *Harold Pinter*, London, 1982; Gale, S.H., *Butter's Going Up*; Peacock, D.K., *op.cit*; Sykes, A., *op.cit.*; Trussler, S., *The Plays of Harold Pinter: An Assessment*, London, 1973. (Note: the phrase 'comedy of menace' was originally used by David Campton as the subtitle to one of his plays. Wardle was the first journalist to apply it as a description of Pinter's work)

presents technical and physical challenges to the actors and directors who attempt the plays, and the implications for interpretation (both by the audience and theatre practitioners) which particularly result from Pinter's alterations to plot structure and characterisation. When considered as a whole, all of the above elements may be considered to be the constituent elements of a new paradigm.

5.1 Language Use

All Pinter's major reformulations of dramatic technique rest upon the specific ways in which he employs language in his plays. Though much of the significance of his language use is intimately tied to questions of characterisation, plot, theme and interpretation, and will thus be dealt with gradually throughout this chapter, the intense critical scrutiny to which Pinter's dialogue has been put over the years necessitates the inclusion of a few introductory words on its importance. Most of the major academic studies of Pinter have placed a heavy emphasis upon the study of the departures which Pinter makes from 'traditional' or West End paradigmatic stage language. More specifically, attention is drawn to his excision from character dialogue most of the biographical, factual and narrative information which was previously used to ensure the uninterrupted deliverance of plot and storyline to the audience. For example, last chapter it was noted that where Christie gave her villain Trotter a detailed biographical history which was in part intended as mitigation for his actions, Pinter provides no information which explains the identities or specific functions of either his villains Goldberg and McCann, or his victim Stanley. The difference between the two forms of stage dialogue was made all the more noticeable through Pinter's early preoccupation with 'inarticulate' characters from lower socio-economic backgrounds: used to the expressiveness of such working-class characters as Jimmy Porter, critics were undecided as to whether the lack of articulacy of Pinter's characters about themselves and their thoughts and emotions was because they were disinclined to be so, or because they were physically incapable. While Pinter himself denied the applicability of "that tired, grimy phrase: 'Failure of communication'" to his work, critics such as Taylor

advocated a line of inquiry taking as its foundation the failure of language in the plays. Other critics preferred to steer a middle course, as Dukore does in the following remarks:

> Pinter's characters just talk... [they] may contradict themselves; they may have more than one name; and what they say is open to several interpretations. To state that they fail to communicate is only sometimes accurate. More often they refuse to.[3]

In other words, critics have tended to define Pinter's use of language in terms of what it *does not* do, and the information that the audience therefore *does not* know. 'If Pinter's characters don't tell the audience outright what they are doing, thinking and feeling', they seem to say, 'then what are they telling us?' Pinter's distinctive usage of pauses and silences in his stagecraft serves to highlight this sense of absence: silence, or the lack of speech, reinforces the lack of verifiable content in the speech that the silence punctuates. It is this apparent dichotomy between the language of the plays and any content relating to plot, character or theme that the writer Nigel Dennis hits upon in his article of 1970:

> All Pinter plays are like elaborations of the drama school exercise, when the student is told (say), "You are alone in a room. Suddenly the door opens. You see a man standing there ... Now you improvise the rest" ... Any text that he or she may improvise is negligible – any *words* will do provided they supply a motive for moving, or sitting transfixed, for pausing or blustering ... for building an atmosphere.[4]

Dennis' article provides an extreme example of a form of critical approach to Pinter in which the actual text is considered merely a carrier for the more important, and unspoken, subtextual information which flows *underneath* or *behind* the dialogue. Valerie Minogue demonstrates this approach in her article on *The Caretaker*:

> ... the dialogue ... has the authentic ring of the stop-gap. Behind it lies the awareness of another world of meanings ... When silence begins to leak through the battered pores of the speakers, they point to the obvious ... They distract each others' attention

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[3] Dukore, B.F., *op.cit.*, p.8. See also Pinter quoted in Quigley, A., *The Pinter Problem*, Princeton, 1975, p.12; Taylor, *Anger and After*, p. 294. Pinter's early characters could be said to be closer to those of Ann Jellicoe, in that they attempt communication with a plausibly limited vocabulary for their situation in life. In this sense, both these playwrights come closer to accurate 'naturalistic' representation of working-class characters than those of the social realists.

[4] Dennis, N., 'Pintermania', *The New York Review of Books*, XV, 1970, no. 11, p.22.

> away to the mundane realities, that are at the same time a symbol of the unsatisfactory state of things...[5]

Austin Quigley in 1975 criticised this form of approach, suggesting that it was founded on an uneasy interpretation of the functions of language. Rather than drawing hard and fast boundaries between denotative and connotative (or informative and noninformative) language, as he believed critics such as Minogue and Dennis were doing, he advocated a Wittgensteinian approach which recognises that language is composed of rather more functions than simply that of referring to things.[6] Quigley quotes Wittgenstein's comments on the meaning of the word 'game' as a means of illustrating the necessity for the abandonment of the assumption that language is bound to strictly referential usage. Rather like Thomas Kuhn in his theory of scientific revolutions, in citing this section from *Philosophical Investigations* Quigley appeals to Wittgenstein's notion that meaning cannot be separated from use.[7] In support of this assertion, and as an example of its use in practice, Quigley utilises an incident from Pinter's youth, recalled to the journalist Lawrence Bensky in 1966. After World War 2, Pinter and his friends would attend a Jewish club situated near a railway arch. To get to the club necessitated walking past a number of people in an alley, armed with broken bottles. In order to pass by safely, they would not fight but instead talk their way through:

> The best way was to talk to them, you know, sort of 'Are you all right?' 'Yes, I'm all right.' 'Well, that's all right then, isn't it?' And all the time keep walking towards the lights of the main road.[8]

Quigley divides this verbal event into a series of stages, beginning with the recognition that the context of the exchange is that of a threatening group and a threatened group. The threatened group initiates a conversation which

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[5] Minogue, V., 'Taking Care of the Caretaker' in Ganz, *op.cit.*, p.75.

[6] Silverstein recasts this distinction in terms of Saussurian linguistics: according to this reading, critics place an exaggerated focus upon the *parole* (individual speech-act), while essentially ignoring the *langue* (language as a codified system) and its relationship to the *parole*. Silverstein, M., *Harold Pinter and the Language of Cultural Power*, London, 1993, p.18.

[7] Wittgenstein, *PI*, §66 (Previously quoted in Chapter 2); Quigley, *op.cit.*, pp.25, 40, 46, 66; Merritt, S.H., 'Major Critics, Strategies, and Trends in Pinter Criticism' in Gale, *Critical Essays on Harold Pinter*, pp.316-317. For a fuller discussion of Wittgenstein's 'meaning by use' argument, see Wilson, B., *Wittgenstein's* Philosophical Investigations*: A Guide*, Edinburgh, 1998, pp.45-56.

[8] Pinter quoted in Bensky, *op.cit.*, p.106.

ignores the given relationships of the groups, and attempts to invoke a different (friendly) relationship. The threatening group respond to the friendly stimulus, thus allowing the threatened group to pass by unharmed. As occurs so often in his plays, Pinter and his friends achieve their objective by playing a specific language game:

> This conversation, once started, superimposes the context that would be suitable to it on the situation that is initially not suitable to it.[9]

The language game employed in this exchange is important in one further respect: it demonstrates "that language is not so much a means of referring to structure in personal relationships as a means of creating it." Pinter's friends created a non-hostile relationship with the alley youths through their use of language. In the following section Pinter's characters are shown to create (most often) hostile relationships via similar means, in which the intention is the subjugation of one character by another.[10] Quigley's approach to the analysis of Pinter's language provides us with the means of avoiding the negative restrictions inherent in the definition of Pinter's language when engaged in direct comparison with West End paradigmatic plays. Rather than getting caught in the negative restrictions inherent in discussing what Pinter doesn't do, Quigley enables us to discuss to what uses his stage language is actually put. The juxtaposition of language and context in innovative combinations is the means by which Pinter achieves so much of his characterisation and plot development, as we shall discover later in this chapter.

5.2 Subject Matter

As with Pinter's use of language, the identification and categorisation of his thematic material has in recent years been a subject of intense critical scrutiny, though not necessarily purely as an appreciation of the merit of the material: critic S.H. Merritt has commented that institutional factors – the "'publish or perish' tenure-and-promotion criterion" has played a significant

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[9] Quigley, *op.cit.*, pp.48-49.

[10] *ibid.*, p.46.

part in the multiplication of thematic studies to "glut" proportions.[11] Interest in this area generally centres upon Pinter's use of memories and other reminiscences and assertions of limited objective attributability in his plays, and the questions of unverifiability which invariably result. Though Steven Gale, the most thorough of those concerned with thematic analysis, unhelpfully contends that Pinter's stance on unverifiability arises from his characters' failure of communication, he does make the insightful comment that "it is sometimes impossible to verify the 'truth' of something because of the very nature of the universe." Pinter addresses this point in the following manner:

> ...we are faced with the immense difficulty, if not the impossibility, of verifying the past. I don't mean merely years ago, but yesterday, this morning. What took place, what was the nature of what took place... one can I think treat the present in the same way. What's happening now? We won't know until tomorrow or in six months' time, and we won't know then, we'll have forgotten, or our imagination will have attributed quite false characteristics to today.[12]

Pinter suggests that memory is fallible, and is subject to our own perceptions, which may or may not reliably record the stimuli which pass before our eyes, and in so doing echoes a change in world view, virtually amounting to a paradigm shift, that has taken place in the field of memory research. For centuries, memory had been conceived in terms of spatial metaphors. For example, the memory was likened to a library in which each book is a separate memory event. This metaphor is superficially capable of generating analogous situations for many of the more common human experiences of remembering and forgetting: the initial encoding and storage of the memory event equates to the deposition of the book in the library; difficulty in retrieving a memory is likened to the misshelving of a book or the corruption of the index, and so on.[13] Such metaphors have, however, increasingly been demonstrated to be inadequate in explaining many of the more complex

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[11] Merritt, *op.cit.*, p.310; also Scott, M., ed., *Harold Pinter: The Birthday Party, The Caretaker, The Homecoming: A Casebook*, Basingstoke, 1986, p.12.

[12] Pinter, H., 'Writing for the Theatre' in *Various Voices*, p.17. Also Gale, S.H., *Butter's Going Up*, Durham, 1977, p.20.

[13] Conway, M.A., 'Introduction' in Conway, M.A., ed., *Recovered Memories and False Memories*, Oxford, 1997, pp.2-3; Roediger, H.L., et.al., 'Recovery of true and false memories: paradoxical effects of repeated testing' in Conway, *op.cit.*, p.143.

aspects of memory and storage retrieval that have been researched in approximately the past 25 years. The development of the discipline of cognitive neuroscience, which draws together techniques and collaborations from fields such as psychology, philosophy and neurology, has led to the realisation that whereas in spatial metaphors such as the library an equivalence is assumed between the (unchanging) memory stored and the memory retrieved, the processes of memory encoding and retrieving are now considered highly complex processes that are highly sensitive to context and conditioning. An example of the power of suggestion upon memory encoding is provided by work recounted by Elizabeth Loftus in which college students were induced to recall wholly false memories of being lost as children in a shopping mall. The false event was first suggested to the student subject by a co-operating relative – a parent or older sibling – and the student instructed to attempt to recall the event each day for five days. By the end of the fifth day the student subjects had typically not only recalled the false event as truthful, but even supplied sometimes elaborate corroborating details about shops they passed while lost and people they encountered.[14]

The implantation of false memories in such a way as achieved in Loftus' work allows us to draw out a number of important points regarding the nature of memory retrieval. The first is that retrieval is affected by the context in which it is triggered; in the Loftus test the students were receiving the (false) retrieval trigger about being lost as a child from trusted family members, thus making the suggestion appear more palatable and more likely to be true.[15] Secondly, false or suggested retrieval codes can be seen to be confabulated with other legitimate memories, as when the students conflate the suggestion of being lost with other episodes that occurred on shopping

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[14] Loftus, E. & Ketcham, K., *The Myth of Repressed Memory*, New York, 1994, pp.96-99. For another example see Roediger, H.L., and McDermott, K.B., 'Creating False Memories: Remembering Words Not Presented in Lists', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition*, 1995, Vol. 21, no. 4, pp.803-814. See also Holmes, B., 'When Memory Plays Us False', *New Scientist*, 23 July 1994, p.32.

[15] Schacter, D.L., *Searching for Memory*, New York, 1996, pp.106-107. That a person in a position of trust can so easily induce or suggest memories to another has important implications for the sensitivity of questioning by therapists and professional counsellors, a problem made particularly acute in the controversy over Recovered Memory Syndrome, which is discussed in relation to Arnold Wesker's *Denial* in Chapter 7.

mall trips.[16] Finally, the Loftus study implies that rehearsal or repeated retrieval of a memory strengthens belief in the veracity of that memory independently of its verifiable truth or falsehood. This phenomenon has also been documented in a 1996 study by Roediger, Jacoby and McDermott, in which subjects viewed slides of a traffic accident, and then read a narrative account of the same accident which included a detail that conflicted with the slide account. Both when the subjects were tested immediately and two days later, a significant proportion recalled the narrative detail as being correct, not the (actually correct) slide version.[17]

Taking into consideration such complicating factors as the few described above, it has been suggested that, as an alternative to the library metaphor, memory could rather be likened to the jigsaw-like piecing together of dinosaur bone fragments by a palaeontologist in the construction of a full skeleton: put simply, the act of remembering is an act of construction. This approach, known as connectionism, suggests that the act of remembering involves not the simple retrieval of the stored brain pattern (engram) of a memory event in response to a trigger (or retrieval code, such as the suggestion of being lost in the shopping mall) at a later date, but instead that the retrieval code induces a pattern of activity in the brain which, if it sufficiently mirrors the pattern of the original engram, will begin the remembering process. Memory, then, is an emergent property of the combination of the retrieval code and engram, unique to each individual at each new moment in time. The understanding that such an idiosyncratic process as memory can hold a fundamental position of importance in an individual's concept of self, and, by extension, their interactions with the world around them, has led Pinter to question traditional conceptions of reality:

> We all interpret a common experience quite differently, though we prefer to subscribe to the view that there's a shared common ground, a known ground. I think there's a shared common ground all right, but that it's more like a quicksand. Because 'reality' is

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[16] For a discussion on the fallibility of source memory see *ibid.*, pp.114-115; Conway, 'Introduction' in Conway, *op.cit.*, p.11.

[17] Roediger, H.L, Jacoby, J.D., McDermott, K.B., 'Misinformation Effects in Recall: Creating False Memories through Repeated Retrieval', *Journal of Memory and Language*, 35 (1996), pp.300-318.

> quite a strong firm word we tend to think, or to hope, that the state to which it refers is equally firm, settled and unequivocal. It doesn't seem to be, and in my opinion, it's no worse or better for that.[18]

Pinter utilises this understanding of the power of memory in his exploration of the ways in which individuals use and abuse power within relationships. A development of his interest in the potential abuse of authoritarian power as displayed in *The Birthday Party*, Pinter dramatises conflicts both of a personal nature, as in *Old Times* or *Betrayal*, as well as those of a more institutional aspect in such plays as *One for the Road*.[19] Irving Wardle describes the plays as being ripe for ethological interpretation which considers the characters to be in a territorial struggle for space, an analysis with which Peter Hall concurs:

> My vocabulary is all the time about hostility and battles and weaponry, but that is the way Pinter's characters operate, as if they were all stalking round a jungle, trying to kill each other, but trying to disguise from one another the fact that they are bent on murder.[20]

Wardle's description of Pinter's world as being analogous to the territorial battles of wild animals indicates the extent to which it is a world devoid of moral certainties. In *The Homecoming*, for example, the 'propriety' of Ruth's decision to become a prostitute is never entered into by any of the family, even though by doing so she is abandoning her children, an action considered highly reprehensible in ordinary society. This aspect of the play so bothered critics at the play's premiere that Pinter was forced to reply:

> The woman is not a nymphomaniac as some critics claimed. In fact she's not very sexy... Certain facts like marriage and the family have clearly ceased to have any meaning.[21]

Similarly, in *Betrayal* at no point do any of the characters question the morality of their extra-marital affairs unless they are the injured party, as with Emma in Scene 1 and Jerry in Scene 8. Pinter's characters may in fact

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[18] Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre' in *Various Voices*, p.17.

[19] Silverstein, *op.cit.*, pp.23-24.

[20] Hall, *op.cit.*, p.7; Wardle, 'The Territorial Struggle' in Lahr & Lahr, *op.cit.*, p.38. See also Bensky, *op.cit.*, p.105.

[21] Pinter quoted in interview with K. Halton in Page, M., ed., *File on Pinter*, London, 1993, p.30. See p.33 for extracts of reviews which question the moral basis of the play's action.

be described as characters without belief. At no point does any character mention adherence to organised religion or established political party with the exception of Goldberg, whose true absence of moral centre is confirmed when he is unable to finish his sentence "Because I believe that the world..."

In a dramatic universe where such staples of societal mores as the censure of adultery and the affirmation of the importance of childcare are absent, it can hardly be surprising that Pinter's characters are left little but to battle amongst themselves for some brand of authority, using whatever weapons may come to their aid, and that the less that the characters believe in or have as moral absolutes, the smaller and pettier are the territories over which they fight. Past events and memories, whether true or invented, are frequently the tools used by Pinter's characters as a means of attacking and subjugating rivals; indeed, Braunmuller asserts that "memory has gradually subsumed many functions physical assault and other threats once fulfilled [in Pinter's plays]."[22] The most concentrated and striking example of this occurs in the one-act play *The Collection*, in which the action is apparently driven by the search for the truth about an alleged seduction of one character by another. The fact that Pinter never in the course of the play conclusively affirms any one of the versions of the seduction told by the characters as objective truth indicates that the search for truth is not actually the main thrust of Pinter's attention, as Peter Hall affirms:

> And if you ask Pinter what happened in Leeds, he does say, 'What needs to have happened in Leeds? What does it say?'[23]

Upon closer examination of the text it becomes apparent that every character in *The Collection* at some point uses the mystery over the Leeds incident as a means of controlling another character, and in particular, over their respective partners. Stella initiates the action by alleging that she enjoyed a one-night stand in Leeds while there on business. In response her husband James uses the unlikely situation of his getting to know and like Bill, the alleged seducer, as a means of intimidating and controlling Stella. [24] Bill uses

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[22] Braunmuller, A.R., 'Harold Pinter: the Metamorphosis of Memory' in Bock, H. & Wertheim, A., eds., *Essays on Contemporary British Drama*, USA, 1981, p.158.

[23] Hall, *op.cit.*, p.5. *The Collection* was originally a TV play.

[24] Pinter, *The Collection* in *Plays Two*, p.132.

his partner Harry's anxiety over James' visits and the phonecalls that have been made asking for Bill as a means of achieving a temporary dominance in their relationship. Eventually, however, Harry neutralises the threat to himself and Bill by visiting Stella and gaining her assurance that she and Bill have never even met. In giving this assurance to Harry, Stella has not only handed to him the means of placing Bill back under his control, but has also provided herself with the means of placing James in her thrall permanently, as he is left with the suspicion of his wife's infidelity, but with no means of allaying his suspicion. [25] James may attempt twice to overcome Bill through physical violence, but his victory can only ever be temporary. Bill's weapon, his memory of what 'really' happened in Leeds, is far more powerful than physical threat in the long term. Memory is intangible: unlike physical objects it cannot be easily attacked, possessed or destroyed, but is capable of altering characters' understanding of the past, and therefore their future relationships with others. In *The Collection*, for example, after hearing Bill's first story that places Stella as unsuccessful seducer rather than overwhelmed innocent, James feels sufficiently confident of his new understanding of the Leeds event to take control of his next scene with her:

> James: Why haven't we got any olives?
> Stella: I didn't know you liked them.
> James: That must be the reason why we've never had them in the house. You've simply never been interested enough in olives to ask whether I liked them or not.[26]

James eventually must accept a subordinate position in his relationship with Stella because he is incapable of fighting against her Leeds memory weapon. In *Old Times*, by contrast, Deeley and Anna spend the play fighting for control of Kate through their use of opposing memories. Their conflicting memories of seeing *Odd Man Out* with Kate are not simply personal recollections of a past event, but a means of laying claim to Kate's person. However, battles using memory weapons are not limited to conflicting versions of one particular recollection. On other occasions in *Old Times* a memory may only appear once, but nevertheless play a vital role in securing a character's control over the past. In Act 2, for example, Deeley tells a story

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[25] *ibid.*, p.145. See also pp.128, 136. Gale, *Butter's Going Up*, p.127.

[26] Pinter, *The Collection*, p.127.

about his time in the Wayfarers Tavern buying drinks for Anna. His recollection has two main effects. It firstly corrupts the audience's impression of Anna, who consistently presents herself in her memories as cultured and refined. Within the play's action, however, the Wayfarers recollection is intended to tell Anna in the bluntest means possible in this veiled war of words that he doesn't believe the image she has painted of herself.[27]

In *One for the Road* Pinter demonstrates the way in which memories and past events may be made infinitely malleable under the pressure of an omnipotent institutional authority. Gila is forced, via an interrogation so speedy it is surely intended to numb rational thought, to improvise a revised version of the first time she met her husband.

Gila: I met him.
....
Nicholas: Why?
Gila: He was in the room.
....
Nicholas: What room?
Gila: My father's room.
Nicholas: Your father? What's your father got to do with it?
Pause
Your *father*? How dare you? Fuckpig.
....
Where did you meet your husband?
Gila: In the street.[28]

Importantly, and somewhat uncharacteristically, Pinter here seems to make a clear distinction between fact and invention. Nicholas' desire to alter Gila's story apparently stems from his desire to place distance between the political activities of Gila and those of her father, who seems to be fast turning into a martyr. In order to make a specific point about the nature of this particular brand of institutional power, Pinter abandons his customary rigour in creating a dramatic world that is free of external (playwright's) moral judgements; *One for the Road* is one of very few Pinter plays in which one character is signalled to the audience as being more powerful and less potentially sympathetic than the others. However, the point that is made is not so far removed from Pinter's other work. Nicholas, like Deeley in *Old*

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[27] Pinter, *Old Times* in *Plays Four*, rev.ed., London, 1993, pp.45-46.

[28] Pinter, H., *One for the Road*, rev. ed., London, 1985, pp.62-65, 67.

Times, is altering the past for present purposes. The primary difference between *One for the Road* and the earlier plays is that the altered memory is not used in the control of only one person, but will probably participate in the subjugation of an entire nation.

In all of the above examples in which Pinter's characters use unverifiable past events as a means of wielding power and authority over others, the language which the characters use to articulate their impression of reality plays a significant role in its success or failure as a strategic weapon. Whatever the subject of the reminiscence, the character delivering it will attune the force and weight of the words used according to whether the reminiscence is intended as an outright attack upon another character, or is designed to subtly corrupt and modify an opposing perceptual view. In *The Homecoming*, for example, Max launches an assault on Lenny as a means of making him acknowledge that Max has been speaking. In making this attack Max chooses as his weapon a reminiscence about Lenny's mother, using language so unpleasant and vicious that it is clearly intended as a direct attack, and achieves its apparent aim. After over a page of silently reading the newspaper, Lenny is forced to acknowledge that his father has been speaking. However, of all the characters in *The Homecoming* it is Ruth who is the most adept at the fine-tuning of memories into weapons of language, for she manages not only to attack Teddy in a sustained assault on their life together in America and all that that encompasses, but to frame the attack in such a way as to simultaneously woo the other family members and make them a part of her attack. Over a post-lunch cup of coffee, Lenny attempts to engage Teddy in a philosophical discussion regarding tables. Ruth makes an often-quoted speech ("Look at me. I... move my leg") which attracts the family's attention for the following speech:

> I was born quite near here.
> *Pause*
> Then... six years ago, I went to America.
> *Pause*
> It's all rock. And sand. It stretches ... so far ... everywhere you look. And there's lots of insects there.[29]

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[29] Pinter, *The Homecoming* in *Plays Three*, London, 1991, p.61; p.17.

There is little doubt that this is a direct attack upon Teddy: only minutes before he had been stressing the pleasures and virtues of their life together in America. That the attack makes its mark is also suggested by his attempt immediately afterwards to woo Ruth into cutting short their stay and going home to America. However, Ruth accomplishes far more than simply scoring a point over her husband. Her recollection of America is the first indication that the family have of her potentially being unhappy in her marriage to Teddy. When this is added to her potentially suggestive behaviour in the immediately preceding speech – "I wear ... underwear...which moves with me ..." – and her statement that she was born in the same area of London, the family may at this point begin to realise that they may be able to take advantage of her while simultaneously attacking Teddy, the 'Outsider'. Of course, the fact that Ruth has volunteered this information is suggestive that she is in fact far more in control of the situation than they are. This impression is confirmed by the ending of the play, in which Ruth dictates the size and style of flat which the family must provide for her future career in prostitution.[30]

With regard to repeated memories, it is the language employed by each character when telling the recollection which remoulds it into a new weapon, ready to be fired back into the battle/negotiation for dominance/reality. For example, the two versions of the *Odd Man Out* story in *Old Times* differ significantly not simply in their salient details, but also in the language each character uses to tell it. Deeley addresses his story predominantly to Anna, as indicated by the consistent references to Kate in the third person, and evidently wishes it to be taken as some kind of direct assault as the language he uses (as well as the details he includes) are harsh and explicit.

> ... there was this fleapit showing Odd Man Out and there were two usherettes ... and one of them was stroking her breasts and the other one was saying 'dirty bitch'...[31]

By contrast, when Anna throws the *Odd Man Out* story back into the conversation, she includes it in a speech partially directed to Kate, thus

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[30] *ibid.*, pp.62-3, 84-5. One may even doubt that Ruth will have need of the rest of the family for very long – their dependence upon her, indicated by they way they are clustered around her as the play ends – is a highly dangerous state of living in Pinter's plays!

[31] Pinter, *Old Times*, p.25.

implicitly asking her to remember and respond to the memory. Anna's story is more directly told, and the language she uses is not only more genteel, and thus in keeping with the cultural references also in the speech, but highly evocative in the way it depicts the speed of the journey to the cinema: "she said to me, looking up from the paper, come quick, quick, come with me quickly..."[32] In a similar way to Ruth, Anna here manages to combine an attack on Deeley's version of the past with an appeal to Kate's memory.

Less intensely explored than the subject material above, but nevertheless a related topic to which Pinter has returned many times in his career, is his dramatisation of the interdependence between individuals which may define and control their relationship. This is first noticeable in *The Birthday Party*. Meg is apparently dependent upon Stanley because he makes her feel needed and motherly, while the fact that Stanley has stayed so long with Meg indicates that he, despite his protestations, must on some level need her attentions.[33] Similarly, Anna and Deeley indicate their dependence upon Kate in their attempts to place her at the centre of their reminiscences, such as their contradictory tales of going to see *Odd Man Out*. Indeed, it may be said that by making Kate indispensable to their memories, and thereby irrevocably entwining their identities with hers, when she denies them both at the end of the play, they may be said to have connived in their own downfall. Peter Hall has noted that such interdependence may be founded upon more violent foundations:

> I think one could make a case that in *The Caretaker* and *The Homecoming* the hostility *is* the dependence.[34]

In *The Homecoming* the only thing that seems to hold the family together is the hostility they share. As the head of the household, Max is the primary instigator and participant in verbal (but rarely physical) violence. He and Sam indulge in sparring matches, while he and Lenny seem particularly dependent upon each other as verbal punching bags. [35]

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[32] *ibid.*, p.34.

[33] Trussler, *op.cit.*, pp.37, 39.

[34] Hall, *op.cit.*, p.16. Also Kreps, B., 'Time and Harold Pinter's Possible Realities: Art as Life, and Vice Versa" *Modern Drama*, 22(March 1979), pp.54-55.

[35] Pinter, *The Homecoming*, p.19. See also Gale, S.H., *Butter's Going Up*, p.137.

A variation upon Pinter's examination of hostility as a basis for interdependent relationships is contained within his portrayals of the power relationships between authority figures and their prey. As mentioned in the last chapter, Goldberg occasionally demonstrates signs that Stanley is necessary to his ability to justify his own existence, a trait which is equally noticeable in Nicholas in *One for the Road*. In his conversation with Victor, Nicholas continually asks if Victor respects him or considers him his friend:

> Nicholas: Are you saying you would respect me if you knew me better? Would you like to know me better?
> *Pause*
> Would you like to know me better?
> Victor: What I would like ... has no bearing on the matter.
> Nicholas: Oh yes it has.[36]

While demanding fraternal feeling from his captor may simply be a tactic Nicholas uses in order to wear him down, the constancy of his attention to that theme, and the number of drinks he consumes at the same time, may be indicative of a deep-seated need to have his authority recognised by his inferiors.

5.3 Characterisation

One of the most important points noted about *The Birthday Party* in Chapter 3 was Pinter's excision from his characterisations of biographical data extraneous to the plot but used in West End theatre as a shorthand means of creating characters that would appear 'lifelike' to an audience. In both *The Room* and *The Birthday Party*, and to some extent in *The Dumb Waiter*, Pinter uses his characters' lack of verbosity regarding their backgrounds as a means of creating dramatic tension. For example, it is primarily that the audience never discover who Goldberg and McCann are, or what it is that Stanley has done, which makes their behaviour to him all the more frightening. Similarly, in *The Dumb Waiter* Pinter uses the uncertainty of his characters about their location and the identity of the controller of the dumb waiter to increase dramatic tension and instil in the audience a belief in the

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[36] Pinter, H., *One for the Road*, pp.37-38.

helplessness of Ben and Gus in the face of a powerful and unknowable authority.[37] Characters of later plays were also remarkable for their lack of (West End) conventional biographies, a situation referred to by actor Colin Blakely in his description of the characters of *Old Times* as "three unknown human beings on the stage."[38] The only unchallenged pieces of biographical information in the play are Deeley's marriage to Kate, and Kate's friendship with Anna; all else is at some point challenged or contradicted by another character, as with Deeley's *Odd Man Out* reminiscence.

Frequently accused of wilful obfuscation, in *Betrayal* Pinter seems keen to demonstrate that a distinction must be made between the dramatic usefulness of bald biographical data, as opposed to the significance of its context and the language used in its delivery. In contrast with his other plays, Pinter loads the first scene between Emma and Jerry with biographical detail.[39] In the course of a few minutes, the audience are told that Emma and Jerry haven't seen each other for two years, that Jerry's wife is called Judith, that he has a daughter Sarah who is ten and a son called Sam, and that Emma has a son called Ned, who is five, and a daughter Charlotte, who is thirteen. By implication it is also possible to imply that Emma and Jerry had been lovers, but that their affair has now ended, as may be deduced from their two-year hiatus in communication. Much of this information, however, is of little value as aids in understanding the main events of the play, as recognised by Robert Cushman when reviewing the 1978 National Theatre premiere production:

> I have a suspicion that *Betrayal* might fittingly be re-titled Harold Pinter's Revenge. I have been accused, he seems to be saying, of withholding the details of my characters' past lives. This time I will give them to you. Much good may it do you.[40]

For example, though the children figure heavily in the conversation in Scene One, in general they make no appearance in the storyline. Sam is mentioned once more, and though Emma's pregnancy with Ned and his subsequent birth

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[37] See Braunmuller, *op.cit.*, p.156.

[38] Blakely, C., '*Old Times* – interview', *Plays and Players*, July 1971, p.24.

[39] Pinter, H., *Betrayal* in *Plays Four*, p.165.

[40] Cushman, R., 'Thanks for the memory', *Daily Telegraph*, 16 November 1978.

trigger important scenes within the story, the child itself is relatively unimportant. Judith, though mentioned frequently, is never seen.[41] The importance of the conversation between Emma and Jerry lies not so much with the detail of the information as with the fact that it appears at all, and that it recurs in various forms throughout the play between Jerry, Emma and Robert. Pinter uses the almost ritualised inquiries into the health of a friend's family as a means of illustrating aspects of the relationship between Jerry and his friends. In Scene One Jerry and Emma use the conventionalities of greeting as a means of avoiding any personal communication which may betray emotional engagement with the other, or at the very least minimising its impact:

Emma: You're all right, though?
Jerry: Oh... yes, sure.
Pause
Emma: Ever think of me?
Jerry: I don't need to think of you.
Emma: Oh?
Jerry: I don't need to *think* of you.
Pause
Anyway I'm all right. How are you?[42]

This pattern of conversation involving the avoidance of emotional engagement or response is continued throughout the play. In Scene Two Jerry speaks about Judith and the children to put off confrontation with Robert over the affair with Emma; in Scene Six Emma engages Jerry in conversation about his family in order to draw attention away from her fears about his forthcoming lunch with Robert, while in Scene 7 Robert covers over his knowledge of Jerry's affair with Emma through recourse to the usual social niceties.[43] The timing of the enquiry after the health of friends and family, rather than the enquiry itself, is Pinter's means of extending the audience's understanding of the changing relationships between the characters.

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[41] Pinter, *Betrayal*, p.236 is the only major reference to Sam after Scene 1.

[42] *ibid.*, p.167. Ben-Zvi, L., 'Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*: the Pattern of Banality', *Modern Drama*, 23(1980), p.231 describes friendship in *Betrayal* as being a set of social conventions which don't allow room for disclosure.

[43] Pinter, *Betrayal*, pp.182, 236, 249.

One of the most important implications arising from Pinter's treatment of his characters' biographical detail lies in his significant changes to the way in which theatre practitioners and audience must as a result view the workings of character motivation, and indeed the very concept of characterisation, in his plays. West End paradigm plays generally submit easily to Stanislavskian analysis of character motivation, which in its later incarnation as the Method of Physical Action involved the actor in the search for a character's given circumstances, their probable existence before and after the events of the play, and the distillation of each event in the play into simple tasks or actions which could then be concatenated into a through-action which affirms the actor's impression of the character's past and future life. Based upon analysis of a character's emotional life, the actor, and by extension the audience, view the character's mental processes, and therefore their actions and motivations, as both continuous and predictable.[44] This sense of a character's knowability is emphasised through the provision of extraneous biographical data. Just as when making new acquaintances at a social gathering, information such as occupation, antecedents and current social/financial circumstances gives audience members a means by which they may categorise the character and predict according to societal stereotypes how that character is likely to behave. For example, Mollie Ralston in *The Mousetrap* is a newly-married ex-teacher with a desire to forget an unpleasant incident in her past who opens up a guest house and wants it to succeed. Her twin motivations throughout the play are to protect her new existence while trying to prevent her past from destroying her; both these motivations are fulfilled in the final scenes of the play, and are linked in such a way as to provide an acceptably unified through-line of action. Such forms of analysis achieve little success in Pinter's plays. Where Christie writes dialogue in which Mollie's given circumstances and future hopes are made plain – "Are you sorry now we didn't sell the place when your aunt left it to you, instead of having this mad idea of running it as

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[44] Benedetti, J., *Stanislavski and the Actor*, pp.6-8; Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, pp.273-274. Robert Benedetti divides a character's emotions into the 'continuous' and the 'phasic', and considers that "the test of a great performance is the communication of the dominant and continual existence of the character that underlies and gives meaning to phasic emotions." (Benedetti, R.L., *The Actor at Work*, rev.ed., Englewood Cliffs, 1976, p.212.)

a guest house?"[45] – Pinter writes speeches in which motivation is approached obliquely, as when one character tells another of his (supposed) experiences at assaulting women. John Lahr compares Pinter's plays to the breaking-down of Newtonian physics and the consequent discrediting of the concept of the objective observer:

> Pinter denies the human animal its deterministic response; his characters are no longer clearly stimulated to act out of a clearly defined past, but rather out of the vagaries of the moment ... Far from being "absurd," his plays mirror a world which modern science has confirmed.[46]

Pinter's characters act and react more specifically to immediate stimuli than to any objectified past experience, as Peter Hall observes:

> [if] I'm sitting in this room on my own, I'm in a totally relaxed state – I don't know how my face is behaving ... A knock on the door, by you, is sufficient to make my face form a pattern ... from that moment on, neither of us ... are expressing what we are actually feeling. We are modifying ourselves in relation to each other...We are playing a game – that is, social intercourse.[47]

The destabilisation of the illusion of objectified characterisational behaviour lies behind a change to the nature of dramatic tension that is discernible in Pinter's plays. Dramatic tension is a technical construct which attempts to describe the emotional reactions of an audience to the production they are viewing. In West End theatre tension is derived from the playwright's placement in the plot of events and vicissitudes that impede or frustrate the progress of the main character to the conclusion of their super-objective that heralds the end of the play. For example, Hester's movement towards independence in *The Deep Blue Sea* is impeded in part by her negative emotional reaction to Freddie's threat to leave her. The audience experience tension from plot complications such as Freddie's flight from the flat, and derive satisfaction from the successful conclusion of the narrative. Pinter's work intentionally plays upon this expectation, calling for a "conflict between

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[45] Christie, *The Mousetrap*, p.290. Part of the reason why the Ralstons' guests are so suspicious to an audience is that they don't conform to middle-class societal stereotypes: many are rude or impolite, and all are intensely secretive, making no effort to be civil or become acquainted with each other.

[46] Lahr, J., 'Pinter the Spaceman', *Evergreen Review*, 12:55 (1967: June), pp.49-50.

[47] Hall, *op.cit.*, p.9.

audience and play."[48] Pinter's audience members attempt to function in the mould of the Zola-esque quasi-scientific observer, watching for clues/symptoms, coming to a 'diagnosis' of the play's action, and seeing it through to a conclusion. However, the audience is never allowed to rest easily upon any one diagnosis; the 'symptoms' in his characterisations alter kaleidoscopically and are garnered not from neat expository speeches but via the characters' language and the context it inhabits. Tension is created in the chasm between the audience's expectation of omniscience and their constant struggle to reconcile the contradictory characterisational fragments with which they are presented.

> In Pinter, the audience experiences only what the characters do. They are privy to no extra information, no other choices. Pinter constructs a situation, where fantasy has the weight of fact ... The "subjective" world and the "real" are not simply confused; they are combined.[49]

By Lahr's reckoning, when in *The Homecoming* Lenny delivers his two speeches to Ruth, the first about attacking the prostitute and the second regarding Lenny's encounter with an old lady and a mangle, questioning the factual nature of the monologues is to misunderstand Pinter's use of them within the scene. Rather, they are intended to convey both to Ruth and the audience Lenny's belief in his own dangerous and volatile personality; both Ruth and the audience focus upon Lenny's arias, which are his perceptions at that moment, and must equally face the burden of the possibilities of motivation that arise from them. With regard to character motivation, Pinter's theatre is a theatre of possibilities, as Paul Rogers, original cast member of *The Homecoming*, recognises:

> Ordinary people don't behave like people in a well-made play, where you follow one line of direction... the people in [Pinter's plays] are real people whose minds refuse to work along what are known as good, clear, dramatic channels.[50]

The actions of the character Ruth in *The Homecoming* provide a good example of the multiplicity of motivation of which Rogers speaks. Towards the end of

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[48] Pinter, 'On *The Birthday Party* II' in *Various Voices*, p.15. See also O'Toole, J., *The Process of Drama*, London, 1992, pp.133-134.

[49] Lahr, *op.cit.*, p.87.

[50] Paul Rogers quoted in Lahr, J. 'An Actor's Approach: Rogers' in Lahr & Lahr, *op.cit.*, p.152.

the play Ruth begins to exhibit overtly sexual behaviour towards the family, particularly Lenny and Joey, before consenting to being a prostitute in Greek Street with Lenny as her pimp. Many critics - and no doubt many audiences - have found Ruth's behaviour here puzzling or even inexplicable. Esslin attempts to account for these apparently unrealistic and fantastical actions by resorting to a brand of Freudian literary analysis, claiming them as a fusion between realism and Oedipal myth/wish-fulfilment, with Ruth's part in proceedings dismissed as nymphomania.[51] Other critics attempt to recreate the reasoning behind the character's actions, suggesting that, for example, Ruth found the American university life arid (and Teddy sexually impotent, a suggestion which has no real textual basis) and the prospect of prostitution somehow more appealing, or that her decision was prompted by the enjoyment she finds in being needed as the dominant figure in the household.[52] Searching the text, we may find a number of incidents and stray phrases which may serve as potential explanations of her later behaviour. For example, when Ruth and Teddy first arrive at the house, they hold a very quiet battle of wills over whether to go to bed or go out for a breath of air. Though initially Ruth doesn't want to go out, once Teddy has decided to go to bed she changes her mind.

Ruth: I just feel like some air.
Teddy: But I'm going to bed.
Ruth: That's all right.
Teddy: But what am I going to do?
Pause
The last thing I want is a breath of air. Why do you want a breath of air?
Ruth: I just do.[53]

This passage clearly confirms Pinter's own comment that Ruth and Teddy are not a happy couple: "if this had been a happy marriage it wouldn't have happened. But [Ruth] didn't want to go back to America with her husband."[54]

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[51] Esslin, *Pinter: the Playwright*, pp.138, 143; Esslin, M., '*The Homecoming*: An Interpretation', in Lahr & Lahr, *op.cit.*, p.5.

[52] Elsom, J., *Post-War British Theatre Criticism*, , p.157f.; Aronson, S.M.L., 'Pinter's "Family" and Blood Knowledge' in Lahr & Lahr, *op.cit.*, p.83; David Noakes in Page, *File on Pinter*, p.39; Dukore, B.F., 'A Woman's Place' in Lahr & Lahr, *op.cit.*, p.115.

[53] Pinter, *The Homecoming*, p.32.

[54] Pinter quoted in section of interview with H. Hewes, Page, *File on Pinter*, p.30.

Here Pinter raises another potential motivation for Ruth's actions: her dissatisfaction with her life in America. Though Teddy may paint it as an ideal family environment, Ruth's memory is of rocks and insects. Additionally, the competitive verbal aggression of Teddy's family towards her may provide a spur to her own aggressive instincts; to quote Pinter once more, "She's ... used by this family. But eventually she comes back at them with a whip. She says, 'If you want to play this game I can play it as well as you.'"[55] Ruth's decision may or may not be made easier by her former career as a 'model of the body', which in the context of the play, where terms such as 'whore' are commonplace, may credibly be interpreted as a synonym for prostitution. The difficulty with ascribing any of these potential motivating factors as the primary explanation for Ruth's actions is that none of them are given priority by the playwright: all are mentioned within the text, but none are given undue emphasis. Unlike Trotter in *The Mousetrap*, whose murderous actions at the end of the play have been made fully explicable, we cannot be certain of exactly what it is that induces Ruth to make sexual advances to her brothers-in-law. Indeed, Peter Hall would suggest that it is a vital part of Pinter's dramaturgy that the audience should be presented with a multiplicity of motivation:

> I think at the base of a good deal of Harold's work is the cockney game of taking the piss: and part of that game is that you should not be quite sure whether the piss is being taken or not. In fact, if you know I'm taking the piss, I'm not really doing it very well.[56]

Pinter's insistence that "there are at least twenty-four possible aspects" to each character's speeches and actions, and that each conclusion drawn about an action "will immediately be subject to modification by the other twenty-three possibilities of it" affect an audience very differently to 'realistic' West End characterisations.[57] Such characters as Ruth do not provide for an audience the same comforting sense of certainty of response that Christie's Mollie Ralston does: we know that she is young and married, that she is relatively trusting and slightly naïve, and that she will therefore always look for the better qualities in other characters, and at the end of the play will

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[55] Pinter, *The Homecoming*, p.61; Pinter quoted by Hewes in Page, *op.cit.*, p.30.

[56] Hall, *op.cit.*, p.6.

[57] Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre' in *Plays One*, p.vii.

survive the murder threat unharmed.[58] There is a causal relationship implicit in the characterisations of West End theatre, where each action is initiated by a clearly defined motivational impulse, and in turn generates the impulse for the next action. In comparison, Ruth begins the play as the demure wife of an academic, and through the course of the play the audience's opinion of her character is fragmented by the barely-disguised sexuality of the "I move my leg" speech through to the suggestions of prostitution and her acceptance of them. The audience sees that she is initially both threatened and insulted by her husband's family yet chooses to remain with them. However, at no point are the audience able to make a conclusion about why she makes the decision, or even why it is necessary. Rose in *The Room* undergoes a similar journey. Safely ensconced in her room at the beginning of the play, her knowledge about the house in which she lives and the life of her landlord is placed in uncertainty, her position as tenant of the room is called into question by the Sands', and finally her identity is challenged by Riley, who calls her Sal.[59] At no point is there an explanation as to why any of these events occur, or even how they are related to each other. In the case of both Ruth and Rose, an identity which seemed simple and consistent to an audience at the beginning of the action is progressively fragmented to the point where any quasi-naturalistic notion of unitary characterisation is fatally compromised.

5.4 Plot Structure

Though Pinter has consistently portrayed such fragmentation of identity and multiplicity of motivation from his very first plays, the means by which he depicts this fragmentation via play structure has undergone refinement over the years. Though his earlier plays, as we have seen with *The Birthday Party*, may be said to exhibit some elements of an Aristotelian structure to their action, the concepts of fragmentation and multiplicity begin to infiltrate the structure of his plays. Nowhere is this more graphically illustrated than in

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[58] This is part of the murder mystery genre's conventions. We know that Mollie can't be the murderer, because she is the principle character in the play, holding a similar privileged status as the narrator characters in Christie's novels (though Christie subverts this convention in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*). She also cannot be the murder victim, also because she is too nice. Christie tended to make her murder victims sufficiently unpleasant so as to make their murder believable and (almost) understandable.

[59] Pinter, *The Room*, pp.92-3, 102, 108.

Betrayal, where the predominantly backward chronological movement emphasises the schism between our (the audience's) diagnosis of a character's motivation at the present moment in a scene, and the physical events of the immediate past which may or may not have led to it. Following the course of the characters Jerry and Robert through the drama, we see that each succeeding event forces an audience not just to attempt to analyse the reasoning behind their present behaviour, but also to attempt to re-evaluate and reconcile the events of previous scenes in the light of the new information. In Scene 1 Emma and Jerry meet after a hiatus of two years. Though Emma arranged the meeting, it seems likely that Jerry agreed to it because of his continued feelings for her:

> Emma: Ever think of me?
> Jerry: I don't need to think of you.
> Emma: Oh?
> Jerry: I don't need to *think* of you.[60]

Emma tells Jerry that her marriage to Robert is over, and that she was forced to reveal to him that she had had a long-standing affair with Jerry. Jerry's immediate response is a self-centred concern for his jeopardised friendship with Robert - "But he's my oldest friend" – which the cynical audience member may consider slightly fatuous, in that Jerry had courted the jeopardy by participating in the affair in the beginning. In Scene 2 Jerry confronts Robert, apparently in an attempt to apologise and salvage the friendship, but instead learns that Emma has not been honest with him; she in fact told Robert about the affair four years earlier. Again, Jerry's primary concern is for the damage this knowledge may wreak upon his friendship.

> Jerry: But we've seen each other ... a great deal ... over the last four years. We've had lunch.
> Robert: Never played squash though.
> Jerry: I was your best friend.
> Robert: Well, yes, sure.[61]

Robert's casual reply causes Jerry to be confronted with another revelation: the friendship he thought so close obviously was not so at all. The cumulative result of these revelations is the impression that Jerry, contrary to his own

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[60] Pinter, *Betrayal*, p.166.

[61] *ibid.*, p.187.

opinion, was not in fact a very good adulterer, and even to be pitied in his innocence, especially when taunted by Robert: "you didn't know very much about anything, really, did you?"[62] Very little seems to occur in the following scenes to contradict this diagnosis of Jerry's characterisation, until the last minutes of the last scene of the play. In this scene Jerry is seen waiting for Emma in her bedroom, ready to make the overtures which will eventually lead to the affair and all the events the audience has already witnessed. Jerry and Emma kiss, but are interrupted by Robert, who enters the room just in time to see the nascent lovers break away. Jerry and Robert then take part in this revealing dialogue:

> Jerry: As you are my best and oldest friend .... I decided to take this opportunity to tell your wife how beautiful she is.
> ....
> Robert: Quite right.
> *Jerry moves to Robert and takes hold of his elbow.*
> Jerry: I speak as your oldest friend. Your best man.
> Robert: You are, actually.
> *He clasps Jerry's shoulder, briefly, turns, leaves the room.*[63]

Silvio Gaggi notes that "it is difficult not to understand this final scene as a conscious Oedipal challenge." Certainly the end of the play seems to suggest that not only was Robert aware from the very beginning of the relationship between Emma and Jerry, but that Jerry (and Emma) knew that Robert knew, but carried on regardless. This knowledge forces us to reappraise all that we have seen before. No longer can Jerry be seen as the unwitting victim of a conspiracy of silence between Emma and Robert after she told him of the affair in Venice: Jerry was aware that Robert knew at least some of what was going on. The carefree feel of young love which at first seemed so present in scene 8 is also tainted by the understanding that Jerry (and possibly even Emma) are carrying out an act which betrays friendship and marriage, deliberately and without mercy; Jerry now seems not an inept adulterer, but a manipulator who uses the affair to demonstrate his control over both Emma and Robert. Robert's 'discovery' of the affair while in Venice also comes under scrutiny, for if he knew of the affair, we must ask why he felt it necessary to

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[62] *ibid.*, p.190; Diamond, E.F., 'Pinter's *Betrayal* and the Comedy of Manners', *Modern Drama*, 23(1980), p.242.

[63] Pinter, *Betrayal*, pp.271-272.

force Emma into a confession. Gaggi suggests that Robert and Jerry participate in some form of combat throughout the play, with Emma as the prize, and that the scene in Venice is Robert's attempt not to destroy the game, but to alter its character, perhaps similarly to Richard in *The Lover*.[64] The process of re-evaluating all 'symptoms' indicating motivations and the 'truth' of what was taking place throughout the play affects every scene, and once we are forced to question our 'diagnostic' capabilities the more incidents we shall find to question. *Betrayal* demonstrates the way in which Pinter not simply presents a multiplicity of character motivation, but uses it in order to emphasise the slippery nature of truth not simply in relation to the characters, but in our relationship to the play as spectators. While we may leave a production of *The Birthday Party* or even *The Homecoming* with what we think of as a clear idea of what action we saw – 'what the play was about' – the audience member of *Betrayal* is taken on a journey from a position of false security at the beginning of the play, where it seems to be a simple tale of marital infidelity, to a position of near total unknowing.[65] The very rigour of the reverse structure of the play induces us to attempt to rewind the play's events to a forward-flowing timescale, and it is the instatement of Scene 9 at the beginning of events that forces us to re-evaluate our previous understanding of the extent of each character's betrayal and knowledge of betrayal in others.[66] Not only are we betrayed by our false sense of security regarding the plot, but also by our memory when at the end we try to piece together a new understanding (diagnosis) of the plot which takes into account the final minutes of the play. Just as the characters' memories of their pasts are unverifiable, so too are our memories of the scenes we have just seen. The more we try to capture an accurate record of the events we have witnessed, the more slippery and unreliable they become. True to the title of the play, we as audience members betray ourselves with our own hasty assumptions.

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[64] Gaggi, S., 'Pinter's *Betrayal*: Problems of Language or Grand Metatheatre?' *Theatre Journal*, 33(1981), pp.514, 515. The action of two characters competing for the possession of another also contains strong resonances with *Old Times*.

[65] Cooper, M.M., 'Shared Knowledge and *Betrayal*', *Semiotica*, 64.1/2(1987), p.111.

[66] Rayner, A., 'Image and Attention in Harold Pinter' in Burkman, K.H. & Kundert-Gibbs, J.L., eds., *Pinter at Sixty*, Bloomington, 1993, p.96.

The complicated time structure of *Betrayal* precipitates a recognition of the lack of closure implicit in Pinter's plays, a factor which may be directly attributed to the apparently conventional time structure of most of Pinter's plays until the late 1970s. Aristotelian action as a concept is inextricably linked with notions of temporality and causality:

> Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole ... A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles.[67]

Aristotle's notion of a well-constructed plot consists of a precisely-organised cause-effect sequence, in which the later events in a plot are derived as a logical consequence from events which occurred earlier: to give a simple example, if a saucepan of milk is placed over a heat source, the logical consequence is that the milk will heat and eventually boil. Aristotle also makes essential to the correct arrangement of a plot the clear definition of where it begins and ends; if our plot line was 'to boil milk', the plot would begin with the saucepan of milk on the heat, and end with the boiling milk. The placing of the milk in the saucepan would be merely interesting background detail, and the fate of the milk (and the saucepan) after it has boiled would be little more than the subject of idle speculation after the audience had left for home. Because Pinter's earlier plots moved in accordance with the flow of time, beginning at one point in time and then in general moving through to a later point in time by the end of the play, it was an excusable mistake for critics to assume that the plays conformed to the Aristotelian linking of temporality with causally linked plots.[68] With plays such as *The Collection* or *The Homecoming*, which run in agreement with the normal flow of time, it is possible and even tempting for critic, director and audience to ascribe to the plays a through-line-of-action (or thematic

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[67] Aristotle, *The Poetics*, VII.2-3.

[68] Regal, *op.cit.*, p.129. Regal recognises that Pinter, like Beckett and other 20th century playwrights, is experimenting with dramatic time, but does not make the specific distinctions around temporality and causality that I make here.

substitute) which makes of the plot an Aristotelian unity and which tries to make every aspect of the script, particularly the ending, explainable via the through-line.[69] Methods of plot analysis commonly used in directorial preparation, however, suffer difficulties in moulding Pinter's plays into neat Aristotelian structures. For example, even a simple macro-analysis tool such as the Price/Grebanier analysis finds the plot of *The Collection* difficult to control.[70] The plot structure of *The Collection* comprises a dual synchronous movement created by the depiction of two interrelated though distinct power relationships, and the fact of this alone is sufficient to confound a tool intended for plays exhibiting a single unified action. In no permutation of the characters and events of the play into the categories of Price's Proposition is it possible to maintain all the strictures around it. For example, if Stella's relationship with James is made the primary action and Stella the protagonist, the logical first incident in the Proposition would be her disclosure to James of her affair, an event which cannot be included as part of the plot because it does not occur onstage.[71]

Though some atemporal elements begin to appear in such plays as *Landscape* and *Old Times*, it is with *Betrayal* that we may see Pinter initiating the break between causality and temporality, through the predominantly backwards movement of the plot events. Pinter completes this divorce in *Moonlight*, a play which may truly be described as atemporal and acausal, and therefore not amenable to analysis in any traditional or Aristotelian sense. The action

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[69] Steven Gale in his thematic study of Pinter's plays describes *The Homecoming* as being explicable through the examination of patterns of need; that is to say, each character is driven by certain needs, or is defined by the needs of another character. For example, Lenny's actions when conversing with Ruth are driven by his unbalanced emotional engagement with womankind. His monologues indicate a need to control females, but his reactions to Ruth's subsequent predatory advances are according to Gale symptomatic of his inability to make this desire for control a reality. The difficulty with Gale's attempt at unified explication lies in his treatment of the character Teddy. Gale paints Teddy as an ineffectual, passive, failed person: "Teddy proves himself capable of doing little besides stealing cheese rolls." (Gale, *Butter's Going Up*, pp.143-144) This estimation of Teddy, however, presents inconsistencies in the presentation of the relationship between Teddy and Ruth. If Teddy were indeed as weak a character as Gale suggests, it seems implausible that Ruth would have remained with him long enough even to enter the family's house. Most importantly, a weak Teddy does not provide a sufficient impression of potential physical and mental cruelty to assist an audience in understanding Ruth's recourse to prostitution at the end of the play. Though Gale attempts to achieve an interpretation of the play which unifies all elements, he succeeds only in creating inconsistencies.

[70] This method of analysis was originally discussed in Chapter 2.

[71] Grebanier, *op.cit.*, p.86.

of *Moonlight* is spread across three acting areas. In the first, a dying man called Andy is watched over by his wife Bel. The second area is inhabited by two young men whom we rapidly deduce to be Andy's and Bel's sons. One of the sons spends much time in bed, and may be ill. The third area is predominantly occupied by Bridget, who spends most of her stage time alone in half-light; she may or may not be dead.[72] For the most part these characters remain in these groupings, only rarely interacting with a character outside of their acting area. Partly resulting from this separation of characters is an apparent disjointedness of subject matter and mood between scenes. For example, immediately following Bridget's second lyrical monologue is a quick-fire mock-businessman dialogue between Fred and Jake.

> Jake: What did you say your name was? I've made a note of it somewhere.
> Fred: Macpherson.
> Jake: That's funny. I thought it was Gonzalez. I would be right in saying you were born in Tooting Common?
> Fred: I came here at your urgent request. You wanted to consult me.
> Jake: Did I go that far?[73]

One major consequence of the disjointedness of the scenes of the play is that for the majority of the play there is no clear temporal pulse: because the characters of the different areas rarely interact, for the most part it is not possible to tell if the events in successive scenes are successive temporally or even contemporaneous. Only once does Pinter specify by implication that one of the scenes takes place in the characters' pasts, by altering the ages of his characters. Prior to their only scene together, Jake and Fred are listed as twenty-eight and twenty-seven respectively, while Bridget is listed as sixteen. For this scene however, Jake and Fred are eighteen and seventeen, and Bridget fourteen.[74] The result of this general atemporality and disjointedness between scenes of the play is that any Aristotelian notion of causality is completely nullified. There is no obvious causal link between Bridget's second

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[72] Pinter has said that he feels that she is dead, though I believe that she oscillates between living and dead states, as indicated by the changing metaphoric tenor of her speeches. e.g. Pinter, H., *Moonlight*, London, 1993, p.1, 21. See also Gussow, *Conversations with Pinter*, p.99.

[73] Pinter, *Moonlight*, p.23.

[74] *ibid.*, p.29.

monologue and the following scene between her brothers; there is no plot movement propelled by logical necessity, as with the saucepan of boiling milk mentioned earlier. With no causality and temporality there can be no Aristotelian closure: the plot of *Moonlight* cannot be said to begin or end in any conventional sense. These variations upon plot structure were noted by many of the reviewers of the original production of *Moonlight*, with varying degrees of equanimity. Peter Charles of *Plays and Players* was undisturbed by the phenomenon:

> We leave the theatre thinking of the situation which is, like so much in life, unresolved at the final curtain.[75]

Charles Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph* and Nicholas de Jongh of the *Evening Standard* were somewhat more censorious of the absence of traditional plotting, while many critics of the production wished to suggest that *Moonlight* was a lesser work than Pinter's earlier plays because its structure was flawed:

> I got the impression here that ... Pinter was gratefully banging down on paper the first thing that came into his head.[76]

Either Pinter has indeed written a poorly constructed play or, as I have tried to suggest, it is simply not able to be assessed using the same Aristotelian-inspired criteria which were developed for West End paradigm plays. As we discussed in Chapter 2, a practitioner working within a particular paradigm, for example, Newtonian dynamics, is directed by that paradigm to consider which observable data and criteria are relevant to their researches; any data falling outside the paradigmatic criteria are not considered subjects worthy of research.

> The range of anticipated, and thus of assimilable, results is always small compared with the range that imagination can conceive. And the project whose outcome does not fall in that narrower range is usually just a research failure, one which reflects not on nature but on the scientist.[77]

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[75] Charles, P., '*Moonlight*' [a review], *Plays and Players*, October 1993, p.19. See also Kane: "Lacking narrative coherence or closure, Pinter's *Moonlight* is an extraordinary play...". Kane, L., '*Moonlight*' [review], *Theatre Journal*, 46:3(1994), p.422.

[76] Spencer, C. quoted in *London Theatre Record*, 27 August-9 September 1993, p.981. Also de Jongh, N., in *ibid.*, p.984.

[77] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.35.

Perhaps the critical misapprehension of Pinter's *Moonlight* may be explained by this statement from Kuhn. The innovations, particularly in plot structure, implemented by Pinter in all his plays fall outside of the narrower range of assimilable results anticipated by critics and reviewers. Just as the theory of relativity moved beyond the criteria of Newtonian dynamics, creating new concepts of space and time through a process which in part included the adaptation of Newtonian vocabulary and concepts, so too do Pinter's plays create a new concept of theatrical structure which remoulds certain Aristotelian concepts and terminology, especially 'plot'. Pinter's dramaturgy is not simply a variation upon Aristotelian stagecraft: the two are incommensurable, a fact which has serious implications for the way we must view the methods of production used in Pinter's work, and is the subject of Chapter 6.

6. Pinter Paradigm II: Incommensurability

> Once the possibility of coherent and reasonably consistent characterisation is removed, drama as we know it becomes virtually impossible. If the joint pretense is shattered, how can the dramatist hope to shape or make sense of his material?[1]

In the previous chapter the differing textual criteria by which Pinter's dramas are constructed were examined with the aim of demonstrating that taken as a group they constituted some of the basic elements of a new paradigm. It was noted that though Pinter's earlier plays gave at least some appearance of being potentially explicable with traditional forms of analysis (those from previous paradigms) such as the Grebanier/Price method, Pinter's alterations to play structure, particularly in the area of character, have rendered the use of such tools inadvisable. Just as some scientific paradigms have, under another paradigm, not even been considered as science at all – as with Aristotelian physics under the Newtonian paradigm, or the study of the chaotic movements of pendula under the same paradigm – so too may a new paradigmatic form of theatre be indistinguishable as such to those used to adhering to other more established paradigmatic criteria. It is this attitude which we may see in Taylor's comment upon Pinter's stagecraft, quoted above. Taylor wishes to describe Pinter's work as drama, but recognises that the appellation of that term as he understood it was made problematic by Pinter's characterisations: the audience is not able to share in the "joint pretense" that, though they must accept "for the sake of argument that other people are more than the sum of so many reflections, that there is a real, single, coherent entity hidden somewhere in the mirror-maze of personality," for the sake of convenience characters onstage present to the audience only this concrete, unified aspect.[2] The dissolution of that particular criterion of dramatic writing was, for Taylor, the point at which he found himself forced to suggest that Pinter's works, though written for the stage, were not 'drama'.

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[1] Taylor, J.R., 'Pinter's Game of Happy Families' in Lahr & Lahr, *op.cit.*, p.58.

[2] *ibid.*

This is an example of the effects of incommensurability, the state which results when two paradigms meet: one cannot be defined or explained using the criteria of the other. This chapter explores the notion of incommensurability, and is divided into two main sections. The first gives an overview of Kuhn's science-based understanding of incommensurability, before describing and explaining its manifestations in a theatrical context, paying particular regard to criticism, acting, and the function of such practicalities as settings and props. The second section discusses the consequences of incommensurability for the production of the plays in an environment where so much work that is seen on the stage still conforms to some form of West End paradigm principles, and attempts to construct some criteria by which the interpretation and production of Pinter's plays may be made.

6.1 Incommensurability

6.1.1 The Philosophy of Incommensurability

Incommensurability is the term coined by Thomas Kuhn to describe the relationship between two rival paradigms, and the fundamental conceptual difficulties which impede their comparison.[3] The comparison of paradigms is an activity which occurs most usually at periods of crisis when the Normal Science programme has fallen prey to anomalies. Scientists must at Crisis periods decide for themselves to which model of reality they are to adhere. The act of comparison and decision is, however, fraught with difficulty. As discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, the exemplars, technology, laws and methodologies which comprise a paradigm constitute not simply a scientific theory but a metaphysical envelope, a 'way of seeing' which determines how the world is perceived and what is relevant for further study. Kuhn likens

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[3] Philosopher Paul Feyerabend also made extensive use of the concept of incommensurability, but his definition is generally considered more extreme in its relativism than Kuhn's. Feyerabend wrote: "Relativism, they believe, opens the door to chaos and arbitrariness. The fear of chaos, the longing for a world in which one need not make fundamental decisions but can always count on advice, has made rationalists act like frightened children. 'What shall we do?', 'How shall we choose?' they cry..." Feyerabend in Preston, John, *Feyerabend: Philosophy, Science and Society*, Cambridge, 1997, p.194.

this to political allegiance. Even when faced with the same empirical data, such as unemployment figures or rates of inflation, the differing metaphysical and methodological principles that the two political parties hold may prevent their representatives from engaging in any truly fruitful discussion. So it is, Kuhn suggests, with rival scientific paradigms. Rival paradigms may disagree

> about the list of problems that any candidate for paradigm must resolve. Their standards or their definitions of science are not the same.[4]

The differentiation between rival paradigms may depend upon the recognition of differing exemplars and concepts, and may be complicated by subtle variations in usage of shared terminology.[5] For example, there is an important difference in the usage and conceptual understanding of motion between Aristotelian and Newtonian mechanics that may at first be undetectable to a student steeped in Newtonian physics. Thomas Kuhn explains:

> in Aristotelian physics, [the term 'motion'] refers to change in general, not just to the change of position of a physical body. Change of position, the exclusive subject of mechanics for Galileo and Newton, is one of a number of subcategories of motion for Aristotle.[6]

For Aristotle, such changes of state as the growth of a seedling into a tree or the move from sickness to health were considered as exemplars of motion, while to Galileo and Newton only the physical movement of bodies from one determinable location to another constituted examples of motion worthy of study. Similarly, though we may speak of 'character' with regard to both West End and Pinter paradigm plays, the concept attached to the terminology in each paradigm we have seen to differ in many important respects. For example, the West End concept of characterisation involves the construction of a selection of personalities whose function it is to further the plot. As the plot is conceived as the working of a unified action, the unitary nature of the

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[4] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.148. Also pp.93-94.

[5] Sankey, 'Kuhn's Changing Concept of Incommensurability', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 44(1993), p.761.

[6] Kuhn, T.S., 'What are Scientific Revolutions?' in Krüger, L., Daston, L.J., Heidelberger, M., eds., *The Probabilistic Revolution Volume 1: Ideas in History*, Cambridge, Mass., 1987, p.10.

motivations of the characterisations is a logical consequence. By contrast, Pinter actively creates characterisations with multiple motivational impulses which are intended to mirror the unknowability of a person's motivations in the everyday world.[7] Kuhn is keen to emphasise that such changes in terminology and conceptual variations may appear localised, but may in fact have a significant impact upon the holistic understanding of the paradigm. Indeed, the most debilitating effects of incommensurability could be said to occur when the terminological shift appears in the most subtle manner; in other words, when exponents of rival paradigms do not realise the full extent of the communication difficulties that have beset them. This failure to recognise linguistic and conceptual incommensurability can also beset historians and commentators of paradigms, as Kuhn demonstrates. He uses as his example a standard sentence that attempts a broad summary of the differences between Ptolemaic and Copernican astronomy.

> "In the Ptolemaic system planets revolve about the earth; in the Copernican they revolve about the sun."[8]

Though at first reading such a sentence appears quite coherent, it in fact suffers from a debilitating linguistic incommensurability, centred upon its inaccurate usage of the term 'planet'. This term underwent a significant change in meaning from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican paradigm. In Ptolemaic astronomy it distinguished "those celestial bodies that moved or 'wandered' among the stars from those whose relative positions were fixed."[9] Thus, the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn were considered planets, whereas the Earth, as a fixed object, was not. After the acceptance of Copernican astronomy, the concept of 'planet' was changed to include the Earth but exclude the Sun and Moon; this altered the 'wandering' element of 'planet', as the Moon was a wandering body but which did not find a place in the new concept. It also radically changed the concept of the Earth, which previously had had as its fundamental characteristic, immovability. Equally, the conceptual shift which affects the term 'character' entails similar shifts in related theatrical terminology. For example, we have seen in

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[7] Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre' in *Various Voices*, p.16.

[8] Kuhn, 'What are Scientific Revolutions?' p.8.

[9] Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution*, p.45.

previous chapters that the West End conception of character is substantially derived from Aristotle's subordination of character to plot. [10] While in both West End and Pinter paradigm plays the action is conveyed to the audience via the characters, Pinter fundamentally changes the way in which his characters achieve this function through his excision of verifiable biographical information and the adoption of the technique of multiple motivational impulses. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the consequence of these innovations is that Pinter's plays cannot be said to present unilinear – or even unitemporal – plots in the same way as West End paradigm plays. For example, *Old Times* is punctuated by moments when the past appears to spring to life, while the reverse chronology of *Betrayal* highlights the preoccupation all three characters have with the past and past commitments, such as Jerry's friendship with Robert.[11]

Linguistic variance in one term can thus be seen to create a domino-style reaction in closely related terminology. Effective communication between paradigms is jeopardised when rival exponents fail to take into account the conceptual chasm that may divide their terminological usage, and to recognise the ongoing effects that may result from what appears to be even a small and localised conceptual change. Ludwig Wittgenstein stated that "Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language."[12] We may well add that fruitful cross-paradigm communication should have a similar aim in view.

The wider implications of conceptual and terminological variance include those that touch upon the nature of observation and the means by which we experience reality itself. We have seen that what appears a shared term over two different paradigms may in fact be the carrier of two entirely separate and incommensurable concepts, and that communication between the paradigms may prove difficult as a result. Wittgenstein points out that the difficulties in communication experienced on such occasions are not merely the result of a misunderstanding or a mistake, but are derived from the

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[10] Aristotle, *Poetics*, VI.10.

[11] Pinter, *Old Times*, pp.39-42; *Betrayal*, p.198.

[12] Wittgenstein, *PI*, §109.

notion that the competing paradigms entertain different prehensions of reality. [13] Thinking in this vein, Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is at pains to demonstrate that a significant element of communication difficulties caused by incommensurability can be traced to the fact that exponents of rival paradigms, by virtue of their language use, actually hold different prehensions of reality.

> Consider, for example, the men who called Copernicus mad because he proclaimed that the earth moved. They were not either just wrong or quite wrong. Part of what they meant by 'earth' was fixed position. Their earth, at least, could not be moved ... Practicing in different worlds, the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction.[14]

Critics of Copernicus were stymied by the theory-dependence of observation: the observation that the earth was stationary both reinforced and was reinforced by the concept of 'earth' as fixed position. Similarly, West End plot structure both reinforced and was reinforced by the verifiability of its characters' pasts and motivations. Thus when critics were faced with the first production of *The Birthday Party* in 1958, their disapprobation of Pinter's characterisation techniques was not strictly incorrect or the result of blind prejudice, even though it may have been expressed in terms suggestive of such a state of mind:

> What all this means, only Mr Pinter knows, for, as his characters speak in non sequiturs, half-gibberish and lunatic ravings, they are unable to explain their actions, thoughts or feelings ... he may do much better next time.[15]

When reviewing a production of *The Birthday Party* a West End critic and Pinter paradigm critic will comprehend similar initial sensory stimuli rather differently: the latter sees a legitimate technique of characterisation, while the former sees a substandard attempt at play construction.

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[13] Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures 1930-1932*, p.112. See also *PI*, §329: "When I think in language, there aren't 'meanings' going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought."

[14] Kuhn, *SSR*, pp.149-150.

[15] M.W.W. of the *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1958 quoted in Elsom, *Post-war British Theatre Criticism*, p.83.

Linguistic and conceptual variance and the theory-dependence of observation formed the sub-total of Kuhn's early incommensurability thesis. Many of Kuhn's critics were disposed to over-interpret his concept, particularly the principle of the dependence of observational reality upon theory (or paradigm). They would insist on a terminologically rigid definition of incommensurability that stated that, as incommensurable theories must be stated in mutually untranslatable languages, there could be no method of comparing them.[16] In countering this charge, Kuhn, in an essay from 1982, remarks that his original usage of the term 'incommensurable' was analogical. The origin of the word is mathematical, and refers to the non-existence of a common measure to describe certain mathematical states. Kuhn took this concept and applied it to language:

> The claim that two theories are incommensurable is then the claim that there is no language, neutral or otherwise, into which both theories, conceived as sets of sentences, can be translated without residue or loss.[17]

Kuhn also emphasises that the incommensurability of two paradigms need not entail incomparability or an extreme form of 'subjectivism'.[18] In a 1973

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[16] Kuhn, T.S., 'Commensurability, Comparability, Communicability' in Asquith, P.D. & Nickles, T., eds., *Philosophy of Science Association 1982*, Vol. 2, PSA, 1983, pp.669-670. See Putnam, Hilary, *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge, 1981 for an example of this argument in practice.

[17] Kuhn, 'Commensurability, Comparability, Communicability', p.670.

[18] The charge of 'subjectivism' or relativism has been levelled at Kuhn by many of his critics, but tends to be based upon an imperfect understanding of his books and articles. Israel Scheffler's discussion of Kuhn in his book *Science and Subjectivity* provides a clear example of philosophical displeasure at Kuhn's apparent relativism and subjectivity. Scheffler interprets Kuhn's position and summarises his interpretation in the following two theses:

> Evaluative arguments over the merits of alternative paradigms are vastly minimised, such arguments being circular, and the essential factor consisting anyway not in deliberation or interpretation but rather in the gestalt switch. (Scheffler, I., *Science and Subjectivity*, Indianapolis, 1967, p.78)

The commentator Gary Gutting notes that only two pages earlier, Scheffler cites a passage from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* that contradicts the first of these two theses, that of the circularity of arguments. (Gutting, G., 'Introduction' in Gutting, G., ed., *Paradigms and Revolutions*, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1980, p.5) In this passage, Kuhn states:

> ... two scientific ... will inevitably talk through each other when debating the relative merits of their respective paradigms. In the partially circular arguments that regularly result, each paradigm will be shown to satisfy more or less the criteria that it dictates for itself and to fall short of a few of those dictated by its opponent. (Kuhn, *SSR*, pp.109-110)

Scheffler has clearly overstated Kuhn's case, for in the above passage we can see that Kuhn is careful to limit the extent of the fruitlessness of discussion between paradigms. Again, when

lecture he proposed five broad characteristics that, in a generalised form, could be found in all "good" scientific theories, and should therefore provide a means of circumventing difficulties of comparison entailed by incommensurability. A theory according to Kuhn should be accurate, that is, in agreement with existing data and observations; it should be consistent, both with itself and with other current theories applied to related observational areas; it should have the scope to extend beyond its initial observations and laws, in order to allow for future Normal Science puzzle-solving; it should bring simplicity and order to otherwise confused data; and it should be a fruitful source of new phenomena and relationships between observables.[19] Of course, these characteristics are merely broad guidelines and cannot be found in every situation, either scientific or theatrical. For example, quantum theory and relativity are theories that deal with opposite ends of the matter scale, from the extremely small to the unimaginably large. Nevertheless, they are widely considered inconsistent with each other, which would fail the second of Kuhn's characteristics.[20] Despite this, Kuhn highlights here that there should be a fair-sized intellectual component to the choice between incommensurable theories. It seems inconceivable that a scientist should either fail to weigh up the benefits of two theories, or having done so, should choose to jettison the old theory in favour of one whose accuracy and potential are minimal.[21] A scientist is able to gain the understanding necessary to compare rival theories by learning the salient points of the new theory in a way similar to learning a new language. However, though the scientist is able to gain access to the new paradigm as a 'foreign speaker', he/she cannot translate the concepts of the new paradigm to the old with any ease.

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discussing the 'gestalt switch' thesis, Scheffler cites another passage from Kuhn's book as being demonstrative of the dominance of the implicitly irrational gestalt switch over 'scientific' deliberation and interpretation. (*ibid.*, p.122. See also Scheffler, *op.cit.*, pp.78-79) As Gutting notes, once more Scheffler overstates Kuhn's argument. Here Kuhn places deliberation and interpretation as important functions in the discovery and recognition of anomalies. However, he limits them to that function, stating that deliberation and interpretation of themselves are not sufficient to propel the scientist from one paradigm to another. (Gutting, *op.cit.*, p.6)

[19] Kuhn, *ET*, pp.321-322.

[20] Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, London, 1992, pp.12-13.

[21] Kuhn, T.S., 'Rationality and Theory Choice', *Journal of Philosophy*, 80 (1983), p.564.

> If different speech communities have taxonomies that differ in some local area, then members of one of them can ... make statements that, though fully meaningful within that speech community, cannot in principle be articulated by members of the other. To bridge the gap between communities would require adding to one lexicon a kind-term that overlaps, shares a referent, with one that is already in place. It is that situation which the no-overlap principle ["no two kind terms... may overlap in their referents unless that are related as species to genus"] precludes.[22]

The community is the 'keeper' of the paradigm; science students learn the vocabulary current in a particular community.[23] Each community operates within its own lexicographical matrix, where not only is the meaning of each term to some degree dependent on others in the matrix, but slight variations in term usage between members of a community can be accommodated.[24] It is the embedding of terminology within these matrices that leads to such linguistic incommensurability. When we take into account this emphasis upon linguistic matrices, we see that Kuhn wishes to assert that in the formation of a paradigm (a hypothesis about reality), and in discussions between paradigms, we must be extremely careful in our language use: defining our terms and so on. If we do not, in Kuhn's view, we shall quite literally have nothing to say.

6.1.2 Incommensurability in (theatre) practice: theatrical criticism as barometer.

At the end of last chapter it was suggested that the generally lukewarm reviews to the 1993 premiere production of Pinter's *Moonlight*, noting a lack of plot and closure, were indicative of a general failure by the critics involved to penetrate the Pinter paradigmatic envelope. This section explores the ways in which theatre criticism may be said to function as a barometer of paradigmatic acceptance or its polar opposite, incommensurability, beginning with an exploration of the function of criticism, particularly its role as an interface between both established and emergent paradigms and the general

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[22] Kuhn, T.S., 'The Road Since Structure', *PSA 1990*, Volume 2, pp.4-5.

[23] Kuhn, Thomas S., 'Dubbing and Redubbing: the Vulnerability of Rigid Designation' in Savage, C.W., ed., *Scientific Theories: Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science Volume XIV*, Minneapolis, 1990, pp.302-303; Kuhn, *ET*, p.313; Kuhn, *SSR*, p.176.

[24] Perhaps in a similar manner to Wittgenstein's 'family resemblances'; see *PI*, §65-67.

public, using reviews of the original productions of a number of Pinter's plays as examples, so that we may examine the difficulties of incommensurability in a practical setting. Before beginning my study on criticism, however, I wish to briefly explore its importance to the dissemination of theatrical paradigms through a comparison with the recognised patterns of paradigm dissemination in science. Figure 6.1 demonstrates the flow of a propositional idea or theory through the process of development and dissemination under both scientific and theatrical paradigmatic strategies.

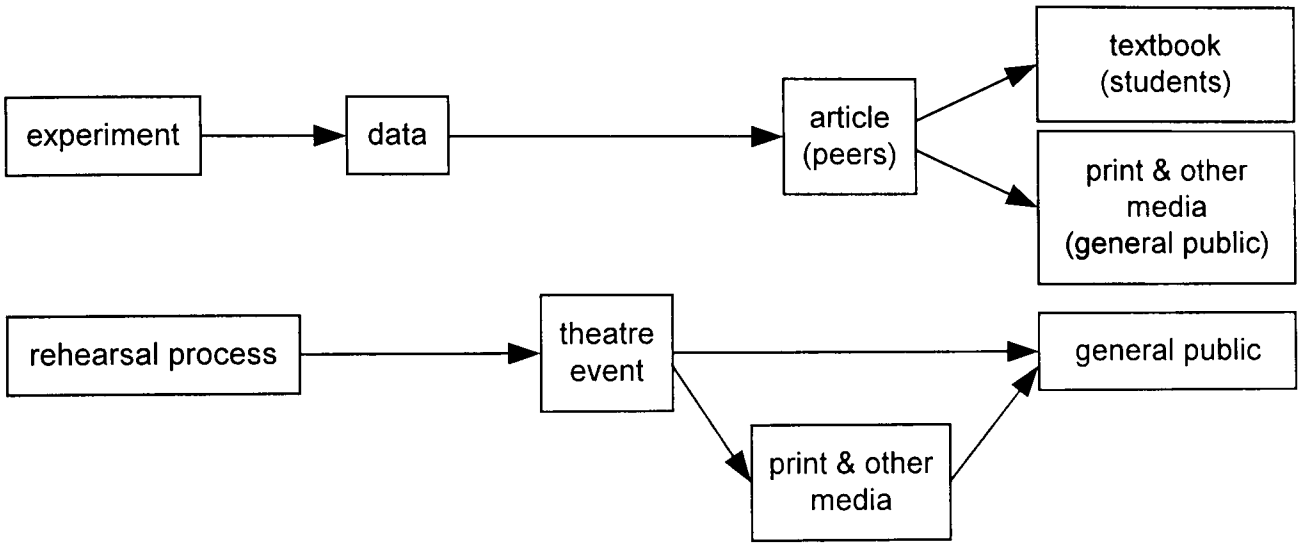

Figure 6.1 Patterns of paradigmatic dissemination.

In many branches of science, and certainly in the physical sciences, the progression from proposition to dissemination amongst the public generally follows the pattern indicated in Figure 6.1. The scientist, or group of scientists, forms an assertion about a certain aspect of the physical world, an assertion which will most usually be derived from inconsistencies or anomalies raised by a paradigm in its Normal Science phase. The scientist(s) then devise an experimental procedure and thereby gather data which will either support or discount the original assertion; this data and the conclusions drawn from it form the bulk of the article announcing the findings, written by the scientist(s) for an audience of peers, so that their results may be scrutinised and verified by other parties. The article written by the scientist(s) may or may not become the object of journalistic interest, and if the findings are of sufficient import, they will eventually be

incorporated into textbooks intended for the instruction of future scientists.[25] The article, textbook and mainstream media coverage all reach different sections of the general public at varying levels of gained competency in the scientific field in question (other scientists, students, non-specialists), and widespread dissemination via the media or textbook is by no means guaranteed.

As we may see from the figure, the pattern of production and dissemination of a theatrical idea contains significant differences from the scientific model. The first and most noticeable difference is that the dissemination of a theatrical event is not stratified to the same extent as the scientific event: rather than different media being used to pass information on to different audiences of varying scientific knowledge, the theatrical event is either directly experienced by the public, or is summarised and appraised in reviews which potentially may reach a far larger audience than the theatrical event itself. Unlike the author(s) of the scientific article, the reviewer is not directly involved in the production of the theatrical event.[26] Whereas the scientist exerts a strong authorial control over both the experimental process and the primary means of dissemination – the article – the reviewer may only be said to be an 'author' of the stage event in as far as his/her review may be the only means of access to the stage event for those who cannot physically attend the show. The difference in authorial control in the scientific and theatrical processes is instrumental in defining the differing functions of the review and the scientific article within their respective communities. The scientific article to a large extent behaves as an extension of the authorial control held by the scientists over the scientific event: not only does the article announce to the scientific community the results of an experiment, but also functions as a blueprint so that other scientists may repeat the experiment so as to verify the findings. Though the actual act of experiment may itself be ephemeral, the validity of its findings is dependent upon repeatability. By contrast, the theatre event is entirely ephemeral, as not only are different productions of a

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[25] Kuhn, *SSR*, p.46.

[26] Indeed, Irving Wardle suggests that active involvement in the production process is detrimental to the reviewer's function. See Wardle, I., *Theatre Criticism*, London, 1992, pp.9-10.

given text necessarily made different through changes of venue, cast, setting, and so on, but each performance in a given production is itself not repeatable.[27] The function of the theatrical review, beyond its initial advisory capacity - providing a safety-net against a dull evening for a cash-strapped populace - lies in its position as a permanent and quotable record of the theatrical event. The newspaper reviewer may thus be considered a curious hybrid of the scientific pattern of dissemination of article, journalistic publicity and textbook codification: a quasi-academic work, but made under journalistic conditions and time pressures, the review takes on the authority of the article and, subsequently, the textbook.[28]

The importance of the theatrical review lies primarily in its pretensions to authority in the face of the ephemeral theatre event. Sometime critic and director Charles Marowitz perhaps unwittingly highlights the 'authorial' nature of criticism in his comment that criticism exists "because *someone* must give punctuation to the theatrical event if only to complete the circuit of theatrical art." His usage of the word 'punctuation' is a telling reminder of the logocentric importance of the review as a means of solidifying the theatrical experience, circumventing ephemerality through quotability.[29] Though this authority is tempered by the subjectivity that is unavoidably inherent in the reviewer's craft, the review nevertheless functions as a point of interface between the theatre event and the public, and therefore, by extension, between the theatrical paradigm and the public. The nature of this interface changes, according to critic Irving Wardle, depending upon the degree of artistic upheaval and paradigmatic experimentation present at any one time. During periods of relatively uniform and stable artistic output, such as in the post-war West End, through knowledge amassed through viewing perhaps

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[27] Wardle notes that Brecht very much cared about the reviews of his productions, considering them the lasting record of the shows in spite of the detail compiled on the productions in the Berliner Ensemble's *Modellbücher*. The existence of these books in themselves is an interesting comment on the desire to codify and 'author' the stage event so that it may be made repeatable. 'Wardle, *Theatre Criticism*, p.13.

[28] Wardle, *op.cit.*, pp.12f, 126.

[29] Marowitz, C., *Confessions of a Counterfeit Critic*, London, 1973, p.1. Even when in these modern times a production may be documented through not only the reviews but the prompt book, production photographs or even a video, it seems likely to me that the ease inherent in quoting text as opposed to tape or pictures makes the review just as important now as it ever was.

hundreds of productions the critic is able to assess the overall structure of the play within the first fifteen minutes of the piece, make accurate predictions about where the plot will end, and can thus sit back and concentrate upon determining the success of the production in presenting its particular formulation of paradigmatic criteria.[30] Reviews of the premiere of Rattigan's *Separate Tables*, for example, make only limited efforts at retelling the storyline or subject matter, instead offering assessments of acting prowess and the effectiveness of minute structural details. [31] That the dominance of the West End theatre paradigm cancelled out any need to think or write about anything other than such relatively insubstantial elements as the verisimilitude of a character's class-consciousness is indicated by the remarkable journalism of Iris Ashley, whose writing is sublimely unconcerned by details of the play, instead concentrating upon the appearance of the leading actress, Margaret Leighton:

> Now the whole point I want to make is that the lovely Miss Leighton does *not* use makeup to become that dismal depressing creature they call Sybil... Why am I in such a lather? Surely it is easy to see. If *this* Sybil can look like Margaret Leighton ... then *why not all the others*? ... there is no such thing as a really unattractive woman if she can only learn how to present herself.[32]

In times when a paradigm such as the West End is dominant, criticism rests in a field of relative stability and predictability, as very few productions will move beyond the confines of the criteria of the established paradigm. Conversely, Irving Wardle notes that in times of abundant artistic experiment the reviewer's task is made far harder: there are no established formulae or paradigmatic criteria upon which they can rely. In such a period as the 1950s in the West End, a critic must simultaneously discern the structure of the play, determine its worth as a text, and assess the success of the production in presenting a new paradigmatic structure, all without any prior knowledge of how that structure will be composed. [33] It is in such

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[30] "... reviewers come in useful as experienced samplers of brand names. After a few years on that diet, you develop a good idea of how light comedies and thrillers ought to work, and your remarks on ... the need for a second corpse to keep the customers awake in the second [act]. will command respect." Wardle, *op.cit.*, pp.11, 124.

[31] e.g. Harold Hobson quoted in Elsom, *Post-war British Theatre Criticism*, p.61.

[32] Iris Ashley quoted in Elsom, *op.cit.*, p.64.

[33] Wardle, *op.cit.*, p.11.

situations of artistic flux that one reviewer may, in opposition to all his/her colleagues, look favourably upon a work that is otherwise rejected. Charles Marowitz describes the excitement generated by such reviews.

> Whenever such a review appears ... I always feel I am in the presence of some precious, tell-tale clue which, if diligently pursued, may unearth a completely different story from the one currently accepted... there is something ominously prophetic about the dissident voice...[34]

Irving Wardle and Harold Hobson also speak of the importance of such events, Hobson noting that it is in these situations that a reviewer begins to move beyond one conceptual framework and towards the recognition of another. Suitably, Hobson's lone championing of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is perhaps the best-known example of one critic recognising and promoting the work of a playwright operating outside the prevailing paradigm. While other reviews of the play were almost uniformly derisory, with such critics as J.C. Trewin suggesting that the play needed 'clarification', Hobson in his *Sunday Times* review recognised that the emotional force of the 'enslavement' of Stanley by his visitors is directly resultant from the audience's lack of knowledge as to Stanley's identity and what he has done to warrant such treatment.

> Mr. Pinter has got hold of a primary fact of existence. We live on the verge of disaster... It breathes in the air. It cannot be seen, but it enters every time the door is opened. There is something in your past – it does not matter what – which will catch up with you... They will be looking for you and you cannot get away. And someone will be looking for *them* too.[35]

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[34] Marowitz, *op.cit.*, p.28.

[35] Hobson quoted in Elsom, *op.cit.*, pp.85-86. Also J.C. Trewin quoted in Elsom, *op.cit.*, p.84; Hobson, H., *Indirect Journey*, London, 1978, p.214. Not every case of a reviewer recognising and praising a work ignored by others will end in eventual widespread acceptance. As Marowitz notes, "There are just as many instances of perverse and eccentric exceptions. The same Harold Hobson has praised gormless nincompoops as highly as he every praised *The Birthday Party*..." (Marowitz, *op.cit.*, p.29) This leads to the important realisation that plays and playwrights that fail to gain general acceptance do not fail as a result of a lack of paradigmatic status. Rather, they should be viewed as fledgling paradigms whose model or perception of reality does not sufficiently engage the imagination of the populace. Quantum physics was characterised in its turbulent formative years by the proliferation of different interpretations of the basic scientific data, many of which failed to engage the scientific community as being sufficient models of quantum reality. Similarly, many different forms of theatre were promulgated by playwrights of the late 1950s: social realism (Wesker), surrealism (Simpson), balladic narration (Arden), and so on. The adoption and continued usage of some of these forms, while others are discarded, is as in science a natural part of the paradigmatic process.

Hobson perceptively realised that the success of Pinter's plays is dependent upon the lack of verifiable biographical data attributable to the characters. While to Trewin this omission constituted a flaw under West End paradigmatic criteria, Hobson recognised it as the keystone of an entirely new means of depicting human existence.

We have so far noted the ability of criticism to mirror the point at which a paradigm shift occurs: when an observer makes the intellectual leap from the criteria of one form to those of another. Most Pinter criticism is, however, best described as an ongoing illustration of incommensurability. Though Pinter's work has consistently attracted sizeable audiences and has frequently garnered a favourable critical reception, the tenor of even the most amenable review is likely to extend little farther than admiring incomprehension. Indeed, there seems to exist an assumption that Pinter's work is by nature impenetrable, as intimated in Robert Butler's review of *Celebration*:

> Whatever it is about – and that's always a gnawing question – it never flags.[36]

This brand of reception to Pinter's work seems in some cases to have hardened into habitual incomprehension. Perhaps the most notable instance of this type of critical response occurs in the work of *Mail on Sunday* reviewer Georgina Brown, who has used the same stock quip in two recent reviews, for *Ashes to Ashes* in 1996 and *The Room* in 2000:

> So what's it about? Well, as the old joke goes, it's about 50 minutes, give or take an infamous pause or two.[37]

It is also indicative of the perceived impenetrability of Pinter's works that, prior to the premiere of *Celebration*, an article was published in *The Times* explaining the basic principles of Pinter's dramaturgy. One can think of few other playwrights who after forty years in production are still considered to require such expository journalism, especially under the title 'Why Pinter is Worth It'.[38] This title reveals much about the position taken up by critics in

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[36] Butler, R., 'From Bacon and Eggs to Confit de Canard', *The Independent on Sunday*, Culture section, 26 March 2000, p.7.

[37] Brown, G., 'Imperfect Pasts are the Best Presents for Pinter', *The Mail on Sunday*, 26 March 2000, p.76; see also Brown in *Theatre Record*, Vol. XVI (1996) no.19 (14 October 1996), p.1184.

[38] Nightingale, B., 'Why Pinter is Worth It', *The Times* (Section 2), 22 March 2000, pp.6-7.

their role as intermediaries between Pinter's plays and the viewing public. The title implies intellectual struggle: the audience should not expect to be able to comprehend all that occurs on the stage. This struggle is, however, perceived to be 'worth it'; that is to say, the intellectual struggle initiated by the play is seen as being in some way an edifying process that is morally or intellectually improving.[39] Of course, in signalling a Pinter play as being perceptually or cognitively 'difficult', one must question to what extent this view of the works is authored (implanted) in the potential audience members' minds, and also whether the expectation of difficulty encourages the audience not to expend any effort on comprehension of the plot and issues, in the belief that such effort will not be rewarded with any success. The question becomes particularly potent when related to the predilection held by critics for attempting to discern some kind of message, moral or other simply articulated meaning in Pinter's work. Marowitz articulates this desire in his review of *Old Times*:

> If ... the aim of art is simply to create a mood, then *Old Times* creates its mood perfectly. But we learn very little about the people generating that mood, and what we do learn has nothing of the particularity we've come to expect from the best art ...[40]

The difficulty of attribution of some form of 'particularity' to Pinter's work, as is suggested by such reviews as Charles Spencer's of *Moonlight*,[41] perhaps

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[39] An fascinating illustration of this point is provided by scanning the reviews of *Betrayal* (1978) and *Celebration* (2000). *Betrayal* on its first production was frequently criticised for being too obvious in its presentation of subject matter: critics suggested that Pinter had abandoned his customary ambiguity, and that the play was the worse as a result: "What distresses me is the pitifully thin strip of human experience it explores ... here, since nothing much seems at stake, [Pinter] dwindles into mannerism." (Billington, M., 'No-man's-land of mannerisms', *The Guardian*, 16 November 1978; Billington later revised his opinion of the play, later claiming it as a modern classic, see Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, p.258. See also Young, B.A., '*Betrayal*', *Financial Times*, 16 November 1978, p.21) In contrast, *Celebration* has been somewhat belittled as a result of its heavily comedic component:

> All is shallow banter. If Pinter penned this play as a jeu d'esprit, fine. But I suspect subtextual profundities are meant to underlie the sarky chit-chat. (Blewitt, D., 'Taut and Full of Haunting Fears', *The Stage*, 30 March 2000, p.10)

From these examples, we are presumably to conclude that Pinter is neither meant to be easily understood, nor particularly amusing. Rather, its worthiness lies in its seriousness and impenetrability!

[40] Marowitz, *Confessions of a Counterfeit Critic*, pp.186-187

[41] "If *Moonlight* is about anything, it seems to be about dying, the fear of death and fractured family relationships." (Spencer in *London Theatre Record*, 27 August – 9 September 1993, p.981)

indicates a specific technical skill on the part of the playwright, comprising another important departure from the realist tradition of both the West End paradigm and New Wave playwrights. Lacey notes the significance of Pinter's warning to drama students in 1962 to beware those writers who wish to use theatre as a means of propagating ideas:

> It ... suggests a severing of the expected connections between writer and play, as well as between play and political ideology; a play is not a vehicle for ideas, but a distinctive experience, the meaning of which is inseparable from the event itself...[42]

If Pinter does not intend his work to in any way present an ideology, whether political or otherwise, to an audience, it may be suggested that, perversely, the general critical perception, born of incommensurability, of Pinter's work as impenetrable and its possible result of dissuading an audience from potentially unprofitable intellectualisation, may perversely actually be advantageous both to the play and audience:

> Much will be said, as always with his work, of what Pinter is saying in [*Moonlight*]; and that is right. But it may be more important to say that *not* understanding Pinter is a very great pleasure. To feel the elusiveness of his meaning is, in fact, to come very close to its essence. People, he keeps saying, are inexplicable.[43]

In addition to a general critical emphasis on ascertaining the 'meaning' of Pinter's plays, other points of analysis can also be found to be consistently addressed in newspaper reviews. Interestingly, these areas are little changed from those first raised by Trewin and Tynan in 1958, but with certain extensions of interest into related fields of inquiry: questions of identity have gradually spawned an equal or deeper interest in the veracity of memory, while questions of the appropriateness of Pinter's presentation of (socio-political) subject matter have widened to a more general discussion of play structure, though still primarily concerned with the relation between form and content. Concern over character identity and potential motivations for their behaviour has been perhaps the most consistent of constituents of Pinter criticism, voiced in varying vocabulary by many of the most notable critics of the late 20th century, for example, Harold Hobson over *No Man's*

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[42] Lacey, *op.cit.*, p.143; Pinter, 'Writing for the Theatre', p.xi.

[43] Macaulay quoted in *Theatre Record*, Vol. XVI (1996), no.19, p.1186.

Land, Marowitz over *Old Times*, and Nightingale over *Celebration*.[44] No play has generated more interest in identity than *Ashes to Ashes*, which was generally seen at its first production as going further than most of Pinter's work in obscuring or problematising the relationship between the two characters. Reviewer John Gross notes that during the course of the play, the audience must constantly re-evaluate their conceptions of the relationship between Devlin and Rebecca, first thinking of them as therapist and patient, then historian and interviewee, then lovers, before facing the possibility that Devlin may be the sadistic lover of Rebecca's recollections.[45] The metamorphoses in the relationship are directly related to the subject of Rebecca's recollections, which are often concerned with sexual and physical violence, the two eliding together in the Holocaust imagery that Rebecca employs. It was as a result of the use of this imagery that most critics questioned both the identity of Rebecca and the veracity of her memories, using her references to Dorset as the site of one atrocity as proof of a lack of verisimilitude:

> These vaguely defined war crimes are not recalled as happening in Srebenica or Kurdistan, but in Dorset ... somehow the idea of a neo-Nazi putsch in Lyme Regis doesn't convince.[46]

Notably, the only reviewer to circumvent the trap of incommensurability with regard to the desire for verisimilitude of identity and memory in Pinter's work was David Nathan, writing for the *Jewish Chronicle*. Nathan equates the elision of sexual and Holocaust violence in Rebecca's speeches with the extreme trauma associated with the guilt of survivors, who must live with the knowledge that their safety was an accident of geography and idiosyncratic circumstance. In these situations, Nathan seems to suggest, one should not be surprised if the trauma of such specific events as these poison and corrupt all memory, degrading the boundaries between one recollection and another.[47]

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[44] Hobson quoted in Page, *File on Pinter*, p.52; Marowitz, *Confessions of a Counterfeit Critic*, p.168; Nightingale, B., 'Pinter Keeps His Promise', *The Times*, Section 2, 24 March 2000, p.30.

[45] Gross, J., quoted in *Theatre Record*, Vol. XVI (1996) no.19, p.1186.

[46] Gore-Langton, R. quoted in *Theatre Record*, Vol. XVI (1996) no.19, p.1183.

[47] Nathan, D. quoted in *ibid.*, p.1184. The relation between memory and identity, and the problematisation of both, are also the subjects of discussion in reviews of *Celebration* (Clapp, S., 'Exploring the Pinterland', *The Observer*, Review section, 26 March 2000, p.7; Peter, J., 'Pause for Concern', *Sunday Times*, Culture magazine (Section 9), 26 March 2000, p.15;

Memory also figures prominently in critical discussions upon the relation between form and content in Pinter's plays and, again, the reception of *Ashes to Ashes* is one of the more notable instances of its appearance in newspaper reviews. Some reviewers found Pinter's treatment of Holocaust imagery in a duologue by people sipping whisky, as well as the elision of physical with sexual violence, as being at best a case of the mismatch of form and content, and at worst as being the arbitrary deployment of ambiguity to disguise a thin political thesis:

> The line of Pinter's argument mystifies me and the use of Nazi imagery appears gratuitous. The playwright seems to be demonstrating the glaringly obvious fact that Nazis who tear babies away from their mothers are also likely to be sexual sadists.[48]

The perceived disparity between form and content in *Betrayal*, while not related to any preconceived ideas about the correct portrayal of sensitive political history, was equally vehement. Where reviews of *Ashes to Ashes* deplored the perceived obfuscatory nature of the treatment of the plot material, some reviewers of *Betrayal* found the combination of the spareness of the play's structure with the stark adultery storyline disturbing. Tinker and Young found the bald structure curiously lacking in Pinter's trademark ambiguity, and therefore unsuited to the potentialities of the adulterous couples' betrayals. In complete contrast, Billington considered Pinter to have wasted the innovation of the backwards plot structure on a "pitifully thin strip of human experience."[49]

It is important to note that, as with Young's and Tinker's reviews of *Betrayal*, much Pinter criticism is concerned with the comparison of the work under review with other recently produced Pinter plays. Frequently the comparison is not entirely favourable. Brown's 1996 comparison of *Ashes to Ashes* with *Moonlight* (1993), for example, has the older play as the better, though it in turn comes off second best when compared with *Betrayal*, which had been

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Morley, S., 'Pinter Double', *The Spectator*, 1 April 2000, pp.65-66) and *Old Times* (Marowitz, *op.cit.*, p.186).

[48] N. de Jongh quoted in *Theatre Record*, Vol. XVI (1996) no.19, p.1184. See also reviews by Gore-Langton and P. Taylor, pp.1183-4.

[49] Billington, M., 'No-man's-land of mannerisms'; Tinker, J., 'I really have to tell you the truth about Pinter's new play', *Daily Mail*, 16 November 1978, p.3; Young, B.A., '*Betrayal*', p.21.

revived in 1991.[50] Likewise, *Betrayal* at its premiere had been unfavourably compared to Pinter's earlier work, Clive Hirschorn for example describing it as inferior to *No Man's Land* (1975).[51] On other occasions the comparison is intended primarily as explanation by means of analogy, this form of comparison being particularly noticeable in reviews for *Moonlight*: the play is variously compared to *The Homecoming*, *No Man's Land*, *A Kind of Alaska*, *Old Times*, *Landscape* and *Silence*. This practice of comparison lies at the heart of one of the most important functions of newspaper criticism: charting the progress of a paradigm. While scientific articles are able in their introductory paragraphs to cite and acknowledge any previous work by other scientists that has provided the impetus for their own experiments before going on to describe the way in which their work extends beyond the previous experiments in methodology or other criteria, only in the theatrical review or the programme note is the theatre event able to acknowledge its antecedents. Wardle expands on this function:

> As Tynan said, the back-seat driver sometimes knows the road better than the man at the wheel. In this sense reviewers have one unassailable advantage over theatre workers: they sit through more shows, and for that reason are better placed than anyone else to see what general patterns are taking shape, what is growing, what is going into decline.[52]

In the act of comparing a new Pinter play with a previous work, or even with the work of a different writer, critics are thus fulfilling a vital paradigmatic function. Though the act of comparison may on occasions be potentially facile or even misleading, it is the means by which the reviewer is able to relate to an audience, in a journalistic shorthand, something of the structure, characterisation and language use of a work, and simultaneously give some impression of where that work fits within a playwright's overall oeuvre. In the case of the Pinter paradigm the relatively high level of comparison to be

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[50] Brown in *Theatre Record*, Vol. XVI (1996) no.19, p.1184.

[51] C. Hirschhorn quoted in Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre Criticism*, p.251. On rare occasions the new work is actually preferred to the earlier work used in comparison. Jack Tinker, for example, compared *Moonlight* favourably to the recent revival of *No Man's Land* (1991), suggesting that the new play demonstrated a profundity and degree of emotion simply not present in the "arid" earlier work. (Tinker quoted in *London Theatre Record*, 27 August – 9 September 1993, p.985)

[52] Wardle, *Theatre Criticism*, p.67. See also *London Theatre Record*, 27 August – 9 September 1993, pp.982, 984, 985.

found within the newspaper reviews is highly suggestive of two points: that the paradigm is not static, and that it constantly strives to extend the boundaries of form and content, whether it be the backwards time structure of *Betrayal*, or the apparent sharp shifts of style from highly comedic writing to the somewhat wistful final waiter's speech in *Celebration*.

6.1.3 Incommensurability in practice: acting methodologies

Acting methodologies and practice are the second most conspicuous area of practical incommensurability between the West End and Pinter paradigms. Actors and acting are the prime means by which a play (and the paradigm for which it is an exemplar) are communicated to an audience: the choices the actor makes in performance, mediated by the director, determine in large part the nature of the characterisations and actions which the audience sees. If, however, the nature of the concepts of character, plot and action are so modified beyond that of the previous paradigm as they are in the Pinter paradigm, the working methods of the actor gained under the previous paradigm may be insufficient to cope with the new demands placed upon them, as McTeague notes:

> For most actors, 'playing the action' is structured along lines of motive, and it is understandable that the actor is set adrift when employing a traditional analytical approach to a text that contains no definitive causal connections that can be organized to produce a clear and forthright through-line of action.[53]

This section begins by discussing the ways in which the Stanislavskian/'Method' school of acting, which has in the course of less than a century become the dominant acting methodology, ultimately fails to meet the challenges posed to it by the characterisations and plot structures of Pinter's plays. The sites of these failures then form the basis for a survey of those criteria which may be said to form a methodology of Pinterian acting.

> One of the major problems in dealing, today, with the nature of acting is that we are the immediate inheritors of the sensibility of the naturalistic period, when a comparison with the lineaments of

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[53] McTeague, J.H., *Playwrights and Acting: Acting Methodologies for Brecht, Ionesco, Pinter, and Shepard*, Westport, 1994, p.78.

> an external reality became a popular criterion for the judgement of acting.[54]

The acceptance and pursuance of some variety of conflation of the Stanislavskian and Strasbergian schools of acting has become so widespread as to be popularly considered almost definitive of the actor's craft.[55] Taught from the mid-1950s by such respected English institutions as the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, basic principles of these systems have found their way into the consciousness of the general population, as evinced by their appearance as accepted fact in 'how-to' acting manuals intended for enthusiastic amateurs. For example, the text of the acting section of T.R. Griffiths' book *Stagecraft* glides across at least three of the principles which comprise the Stanislavskian 'System', those of constructing autobiographical histories of characters, thinking like the character at all times, and the use of the 'magic if'. [56] The genesis of Stanislavski's acting method, and by extension its descendent the 'Method', can be traced to the same intellectual movements of humanism and scientific Enlightenment which spawned the naturalist movement. Stanislavski's System may be seen as the first significant attempt to create a systematic acting methodology along lines of scientific thoroughness and observation.[57] This is indicated in the exhaustive observations Stanislavski took upon his own acting in order to understand the nature of the craft of creating successful and, notably, *repeatable* acting. From the age of fourteen until his death Stanislavski kept detailed notebooks of all his theatre experiences, with many of the earlier journals containing observations upon such topics as the effect such psychophysical acts as anxiety and being in love had upon his acting ability.[58] The second

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[54] Harrop, J., *Acting*, London, 1992, p.33.

[55] The musical *Fame* includes a character studying acting, who carries a copy of *An Actor Prepares* and reads short excerpts from it in an early scene. When I saw the production, this scene became particularly amusing, as the singer-dancer-actor playing the fledgling actor gave a performance that indicated that he probably hadn't read any of the rest of Stanislavski's book!

[56] Griffiths, *Stagecraft*, p.62, p.65. The 'magic if' appears in Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, pp.46-7. An example of Stanislavski constructing a biography for the character Roderigo appears in Stanislavski quoted in Worthen, W.B., *The Idea of the Actor: Drama and the Ethics of Performance*, Princeton, 1984, p.146.

[57] Harrop, *op.cit.*, p.36.

[58] Gordon, M., *The Stanislavsky Technique: Russia*, New York, 1988, pp.6, 12-13.

remarkable factor in Stanislavski's System was its concern with inner processes as opposed to the codification of gestures. The emphasis of both the Stanislavskian system as it appears in *An Actor Prepares* and of the 'Method' of Strasberg, involves an actor's preoccupation with the 'inner' processes of their character, that is, their thoughts and emotions, and with 'inner' processes within themselves, particularly those involving concentration and relaxation. In terms of work on character, Stanislavski's two most influential notions were those of *emotion memory* (or affective memory) and *through-line-of-action*. Emotion memory is a concept that requires the actor to undertake intuitive work on the inner processes of a character by utilising (or cannibalising) their own thoughts, memories and emotions as source material. That is to say, the actor must take a character's lines, for example, Hedda Gabler's exchange over Miss Tesman's hat; decide upon the character's thoughts at that moment – that she is annoyed at Miss Tesman's presence and wishes to annoy her into leaving – and then use a similar situation from their own lives as the 'trigger' so that the correct emotion (annoyance and deliberate cunning) may be visible to the audience.[59] Strasberg expresses it thus:

> [The actor] must fuse his personal emotion with the character and event he is portraying. For example, when the actor's partner is speaking, he listens and answers naturally, but at the same time he tries to concentrate on the objects of his own event and thus fuse his material with the author's.[60]

The through-line-of-action may be conceived as the means by which an actor's conglomeration of 'triggers', or the emotional high points of a characterisation, may be concatenated into the portrayal of a psychologically unified personality. Each of these emotional 'high points' became discrete units or sub-categories of a larger action which the character was considered to complete over the course of a play. Beginning with an overall concept of the action a character was to complete in the play, the actor would in the course of the rehearsal process divide the play into smaller and smaller sections – units and beats – so as to make each emotional demand more manageable

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[59] Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*, p.253f.

[60] Hethmon, R.H., ed., *Strasberg at the Actor's Studio*, New York, 1991, p.111. See Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, pp.173-177 for Stanislavski's discussion of emotion memory.

and avoid playing 'in general', that is, without the correct degree of emotional verisimilitude and particularity.[61]

Stanislavski's desire for unity of character mirrored the nineteenth century focus of enquiry upon the individual as the basis of emotional, social and political life, while his emphasis upon creating a truthful sense that the character before the audience was behaving as a result of past emotions and traumas (whether the actor's own or derived from the text) has distinct naturalist roots.[62] Most importantly of all, however, is the degree to which the 'truthfulness' or 'sincerity' of an actor's performance was considered the hallmark of good acting. This did not simply entail physical verisimilitude, but mental and emotional also: the task of the actor was to give the impression that they were conveying to the audience the whole of a character's existence. In Chekhov or Ibsen a character may be placed in a situation where they must behave in a certain way to other characters while, unknown to the other characters but known to the audience, they feel differently. For example, at the beginning of *The Seagull* Medviedenko asks Masha "Why do you always wear black" not simply because he is curious, but because he is in love with her and doesn't know what to say, and the audience is privy to both his curiosity and his fear.[63] The audience are the privileged observers; in order to see and understand the ways in which the past thoughts and histories of the characters impact upon their actions in the present, they are the observers of text and subtext in a way that is in fact quite unlike an audience member's experience of ordinary life, where it is normal for events to take place and for people to behave in ways that cannot be completely understood. Stanislavski's acting methodology, with its emphasis on psychophysical verisimilitude, is perfectly placed to provide actors who are capable of laying a character bare to an artificially omniscient audience.

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[61] Hethmon, *op.cit.*, p.293; Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, pp.111-112. In this particular passage in *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavski compares the breaking up of a role into units and objectives to the carving of a turkey – one cannot eat the bird whole!

[62] Worthen, *op.cit.*, p.145.

[63] Chekhov, A., *The Seagull* in *Five Plays*, trans. E. Fen, London, 1959, p.119.

The broad concordance between the naturalist theatre movement and Stanislavskian acting methodology, understandable as they had their genesis at the same historical point, mean that Stanislavskian or 'Method' acting are highly suited to West End paradigm plays, based as they are upon similar philosophical and technical principles. Pinter's plays, however, do not fit the naturalist philosophical underpinnings of Stanislavskian methodology in two important and interrelated respects. Firstly, as noted last chapter, Pinter's plays do not exhibit a unity of action in the same way as West End plays. With no super-objective, there can be no through-line-of-action for the characters, and therefore there can be no Stanislavskian division of the roles into units, beats or objectives. For example, the 'multiple motivations' of characters such as Ruth in *The Homecoming* are inimical to any concept of play structure that is so tied to a linear progression, for as we have seen in the previous chapter, part of Pinter's intention in creating characters with any number of motivations for their actions is to prevent the audience from viewing the behaviour of the character and feeling that they have sufficient understanding of both the situation and the character to attribute reasons why the character is behaving as they are.[64] Additionally, Pinter's insistence upon the nonverifiability of characters' memories and anecdotes places great strain upon the efficacy of both through-line-of-action and emotion memory. Both of these concepts assume the truth of a character's disclosures of their past and their emotional engagement with it: we neither disbelieve Hester's story about the day she met Freddie Page, nor doubt the sincerity of her past and present lustful feelings towards him. Characters such as Deeley or Anna, however, deploy the disclosures of their memories in such a way that it is simply not possible to be certain as to their degree of personal engagement with those memories, or even if the recollections are accurate. For example, when in Act 2 of *Old Times* Deeley recalls meeting Anna many times at the Wayfarers Arms, Anna's first responses are to question his story: "You're saying we've met before?" However, such responses are not denials, and it is impossible for the reader or audience to tell if her apology at the conclusion of

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[64] See Cima, G.G., 'Acting on the Cutting Edge: Pinter and the Syntax of Cinema' in Gale, *Critical Essays on Harold Pinter*, p.249f.

the story of how Deeley lost her at a party is genuine or sarcasm.[65] The audience are therefore left with two distinct queries regarding this exchange: is Deeley telling the truth about the Wayfarers Arms, and whether or not he is, does Anna take him seriously or is she fully cognisant of his attempt to blacken her reputation and is she therefore planning her next move against him? Whereas Chekhov, Ibsen, Strindberg and Rattigan intended their characters to be truthful about themselves regarding emotion and motivation to the audience, Pinter's characters are just as evasive to the audience as they are to each other. As director Carey Perloff discovered when directing *The Birthday Party* for the Classic Stage Company in New York in 1988, this imperative for unknowability cannot be sustained under the methodology of a psychologically-based acting system:

> It had quickly become clear to us that in a Pinter play, language is used to veil or disguise emotion, not to reveal it. For American actors trained in direct emotional expression and unaccustomed to the concealing powers of subtle language, a Pinter text poses formidable challenges ... Most American actors have great resistance to what they consider to be "technical" solutions to character problems: the goal is emotional truth at all costs.[66]

The refusal of Pinter's characters to be understood by anyone – not other characters, nor the audience, nor even the author[67] - is a stumbling block to the efficacious use of any variety of quasi-Stanislavskian acting process in the creation of characterisation. Rather than a methodology which insists on creating and projecting to the audience the inner life of a character, we must instead look for a Pinterian acting methodology amongst the different processes that lie at the other side of the 'emotion' versus 'technique' chasm that dominates much theoretical writing about acting.[68] David Mamet, a close friend of Pinter, puts it thus:

> The actor is onstage to communicate the play to the audience. That is the beginning and the end of his and her job... The actor does not need to "become" the character ... There *is* no character.

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[65] Pinter, *Old Times*, pp.44-48.

[66] Perloff, C., 'Pinter in Rehearsal: From *The Birthday Party* to *Mountain Language*" in Burkman& Kundert-Gibbs, *Pinter at Sixty*, p.4.

[67] Pinter has often stated that his characters, even during the writing of a play, seem to have some kind of existence that lies outside of his authorial control. Pinter 'Writing for the Theatre', pp.xii-xiii.

[68] For a history of this division in acting theory see Harrop, *op.cit.*, pp.35-36.

> There are only lines on a page ... When [an actor] says them simply, in an attempt to achieve an object more or less like that suggested by the author, the audience sees an *illusion* of a character upon the stage. To create this illusion the actor has to undergo nothing whatever. He or she is as free of the necessity of "feeling" as the magician is free of the necessity of actually summoning supernormal powers.[69]

Mamet's words suggest that the Pinterian actor must focus, not on creating potentially spurious emotional states or on 'motivations' that do not exist, but rather on interactions with other actors, for it is only here and in interactions with the audience that the actor may explore the role from moment to moment[70]. The concept of audience interaction is another area in which Pinter's stagecraft moves away from Stanislavskian acting methodology. Perhaps not necessarily easily recognised by an audience is the degree to which actors in Pinter plays requires a close relationship to the mood of the audience as a whole. Peter Hall has recounted a statement made by John Gielgud during the rehearsals of the premiere production of *No Man's Land*:

> John said to Harold that playing Pinter was like playing Congreve or Wilde. It needed a consciousness of the audience, a manipulation of them which was precisely the same as for high classical comedy. He thought it would be like playing Chekhov – where you must ignore the audience – but it wasn't.[71]

Hall here seems to suggest that the Pinterian actor holds a moment-by-moment responsibility for controlling and manipulating the audience's reception of their character's different 'motivational' impulses. For example, an actress playing Ruth in *The Homecoming* is at any time responsible for whether the audience sees her as being a bored housewife, a whore, a nymphomaniac, and so on, and that the changes made in the audience's impression of the character are made in direct response to the way in which the actress feels the audience has received previous characterisational hints. This is in direct contrast to Stanislavskian technique, which particularly prized an actor's total control of concentration away from the 'black hole' of the auditorium and towards the stage using 'circles of concentration', as it

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69 Mamet, D., *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor*, London, 1997, p.9.

70 McTeague, *op.cit.*, p.104.

71 Peter Hall, *Diaries* quoted in Page, *File on Pinter*, p.50.

was believed that moving concentration away from the stage environment would be detrimental to the efficient portrayal of character.[72]

Perhaps ironically, the first methodology of 'physical' acting was also created by Stanislavski. Though relatively unknown and still in formulation at the time of his death, the Method of Physical Actions was Stanislavski's move away from the primarily psychological work on character demanded by his earlier approaches:

> Only that which could be physically performed and seen by an audience was allowed. Therefore, a character in love could not be acted merely through feeling; a Physical Action had to express it.[73]

Though like the earlier theories the Method of Physical Actions was still conceived as creating a character which completed a through-line-of-action in the course of a play, anecdotal evidence of the ways in which Stanislavski encouraged his actors to undertake physical activities as a means of displaying action and character may be seen to be mirrored in certain aspects of Pinter's dramaturgy. V.O. Toporkov recalled in his book *Stanislavski in Rehearsal* an occasion when he was faced with Stanislavski's displeasure at the way he had portrayed a cashier in a scene from *The Embezzlers*. Rather than ask Toporkov to work on the emotions of the character, Stanislavski instead asked him to work on the way in which the cashier would tidy his desk in preparation for a day's work. After some initial resistance, Toporkov found the exercise compelling:

> I did not notice how completely fascinated I had become with all these things. It was very pleasant to be occupied with this stage business ... I start this work with all my attention ... Oh! The rehearsal is commencing. My cue has come, I open the cash window and begin my scene.[74]

Toporkov's deep personal involvement with the arrangement of the desk seems to parallel closely the stage direction from *The Birthday Party* discussed in Chapter 4, in which McCann tears sheets of newspaper into five equal strips. Even more than Stanislavski's direction to Toporkov, which is

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[72] Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, pp.74-75.

[73] Gordon, *op.cit.*, p.208.

[74] Toporkov, *op.cit.*, p.47.

prefaced with remarks on characterisation, Pinter's stage direction is clearly intended as a personal challenge for the actor. Both Stanislavski and Pinter use the application of mechanical physical tasks as a means of engaging the actor's concentration, so that the audience viewing the actor carrying out the task may respond to it as a fragment of character information. However, as an author Pinter takes this rather further than Stanislavski the director, for by writing such stage directions into his scripts Pinter is able to control partially the actor's interpretation of the role without the inclusion of any surplus expository or explanatory dialogue. When the audience first sees McCann tearing up the newspaper, it is just prior to the beginning of Stanley's victimisation, and without using any prior dialogue with Goldberg or even soliloquies, Pinter economically conveys to the audience that McCann is apprehensive about the incipient interrogation. Importantly, through the brevity and practicality of the stage direction Pinter also conveys that, though McCann is nervous, the expression of the emotion is almost entirely suppressed. This is achieved precisely through the lack of any 'editorialising' on Pinter's part about the character's emotional state at that juncture of the play: the direction does not include any emotionally suggestive adverbs ('fitfully', 'anxiously'), not does it require McCann to undertake traditional or clichéd signs of nervousness, such as pacing, that involve large amounts of physical activity. It is the very stillness of McCann's gesture that gives it its power as characterisation.

Stillness is very much at the centre of Pinter's dramatic writing: his characters move little on the stage. The prompt books of both the 1978 and 1998 Royal National Theatre productions of *Betrayal*, for example, are remarkable both for the lack of activity recorded by the stage manager, and the extent to which the moves recorded are simply elaborations of those visible in the printed edition of the script, for example, when actors sip their drinks. While this stillness, and the resultant increased significance of any moves made, has a clear function in Pinter's work as a means of dramatising power relationships, which shall be discussed below, it is also an example how the specification of a lack of movement may also be a means of creating characterisation via the setting of personal challenges for an actor. Put simply, it may often be very difficult for an actor to keep still for the long

periods that Pinter often requires, as Colin Blakely discovered when acting in *Old Times*:

> To sit in a chair for such a long time, holding everything in, was quite an effort. In the interval and after a performance my body is literally shaking from all the mental energy spent holding back. When I finally do let go at the end of the play it is real *anger*... I'm blazing from having spent over an hour waiting to explode.[75]

In Blakely's experience the stillness of *Old Times*, which contains very few stage directions, contributed directly to his performance of the end of the play, where Deeley is required to break down, sobbing. The degree to which this very physical contribution to the play's climax was intended by Pinter is indicated by Blakely's additional comment that "when we started trying to 'move' the play we discovered we couldn't do it."[76] The text of the play is so economical with both words and gestures that the actors were unable to find any areas where additional moves could be inserted without breaking the visual and vocal rhythm of the play.

Another brand of acting described as being based on 'technique' rather than inner processes was that which graced the stages of repertory theatres over England at the time when Pinter began writing his plays, and of which he had first-hand experience. Even more than most commercial theatre, repertory companies did not have the luxury of long rehearsal times, and the punishing schedules created by the ever-changing list of plays being performed did not allow the actors any spare time in which to consider their characters' emotional states. Rather, the roles had to be immediately and broadly delineated, relying on the rhythms of the dialogue and possibly utilising an actor's personal store of stock gestures and vocal inflexions which though derided by Stanislavski as preventing the actor from thinking analytically about their role, were at least a speedy method of achieving a performance sufficiently accomplished to appear before an audience within days.[77] Pinter's own experience assisting Alan Schneider's direction of *The Collection* in America indicates that a cerebral approach to the roles doesn't necessarily aid the actor, though the rhythms of the text may:

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[75] Blakely, *op.cit.*, p.24.

[76] *ibid.*

> I remember saying ... 'Why don't you just say the line ... Just say the line. I recommend this emphasis. It will come and you'll feel OK, really.' They looked me as if I was mad. I was going the other way round. I was saying that the music and the rhythm will tell you what you mean. You can work yourself into the ground, and you won't ever get anywhere unless you get the precise emphasis, and then the sense of the sentence will become clear.[78]

Notably, Pinter's early works were made famous in part through the work of Vivien Merchant, who made her name in repertory.[79] Though the repertory companies have disappeared, the speed of production in repertory and the necessity of speedy delineation of character that was so characteristic of repertory has survived in television and film. Interestingly, actors in recent productions, particularly those cast in the younger roles, have tended to have significant quantities of experience in television, film and radio. Douglas Hodge, Lia Williams and Imogen Stubbs all have extensive television or film credits to their names, while Steven Pacey appeared in the TV series *Blakes 7* early in his career, and has since appeared in over 300 radio productions.[80] These actors are accustomed to short rehearsal times and the development of character through physical or vocal means rather than lengthy discussions on inner process, and have what is perhaps an advantage considering the fluidity of time in Pinter's later work, a familiarity with performing out of chronological sequence.

It is perhaps through the playing of specific stage directions, the undertaking of personal acting challenges and a favouring of the repertory technique of using the rhythms of the text as a means of navigating a character that may present the most promising criteria of a methodology of Pinterian acting. This emphasis upon concrete or mechanical actions rather than analysis of a character's inner processes is at heart a psychophysical one, reminiscent of

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[77] Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, pp.23-24.

[78] Pinter quoted in Gussow, *Conversations with Pinter*, p.108.

[79] Initially, Merchant was far better known as an actor than Pinter. Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, p.54.

[80] Information taken from the programmes of the following productions: *Betrayal*, National Theatre, 1999; *The Birthday Party*, Theatre Royal Bath Productions, 1999; *Celebration and The Room*, Almeida Theatre, 2000. Cima believes that a cinematic approach to Pinter's work is advisable for actors, as it encourages 'behavioural' acting and a consciousness that Pinter uses dialogue and stage directions to change focus between characters and points of view in a highly cinematic style. See Cima, *op.cit.*, p.249.

the work of F.M. Alexander and Moshe Feldenkrais. It recognises that the actor's craft is in essence physical, simply through virtue of the actor's bodily presence upon the stage, and that the way in which a body is moved or held affects the manifestation of the personality. Additionally, the body itself is a powerful sign for the audience. When Deeley sits slumped in a chair at the end of *Old Times*, we can be in little doubt of his despair, whether or not this emotion is actually 'felt' by the actor. By adhering to an acting approach that is more attuned to the physical than the emotional, the actor may succeed in avoiding the difficulties in the presentation of multiple motivations that may otherwise be experienced under a Stanislavskian approach. However, the way in which an actor chooses to approach a role is a matter of personal preference, and the impetus for the creation of a specific methodology for a paradigm may have passed away with Stanislavski and Strasberg. Any principles of Pinterian acting that we have discovered may be best utilised as advice for directors, so that they may aid the actors with their characterisations during the rehearsal process.

6.1.4 Incommensurability in practice: spatial awareness and the stage

This section examines the degree to which set design and use of props and acting space is subject to metamorphosis under the Pinter paradigm. In the early plays Pinter to some extent traded upon the naturalist usage of setting as a means of projecting characterisation: seeing the character (animal) in his/her (its) natural environment (habitat). In Chapter 4 we noted that both Rose in *The Room* and Meg in *The Birthday Party* are intimately connected to the spaces which they inhabit, and that the action of *The Room* in part is forwarded by attacks by other characters on Rose's ownership of her room and its contents. These early plays are notable for the degree of realistic detail which is included in the settings: in *The Room* and *The Birthday Party* food is cooked onstage and tableware moved backwards and forwards, and in *The Caretaker* the playing space is filled with bits and pieces of junk and bric-a-brac. Through time, however, Pinter's use of the stage, and by extension props and other physical objects, have developed into an individual philosophy of the utilisation of space as a means of propelling action and

characterisation. As we shall see in this section, it becomes more and more clear that the content of the space, or the verisimilitude of its contents, are increasingly unimportant: many of Pinter's later settings are heavily minimalist, often verging towards the abstract. What is important is the way the set, prop or acting space is used, and by which character. The stripping away of naturalistic detail, perhaps ironically, serves to focus audience attention upon character in the concentrated fashion which the original theorists of naturalism desired. Pinter's use of props and stage space is also remarkable for both the degree to which it is codified in his playscripts, and the extent to which these codifications are adhered to in performance. It is through the examination of this aspect of Pinter's stagecraft that we begin to discern a fundamental difference in the way in which Pinter's playscripts must be viewed when compared with works of the West End paradigm: that Pinter's works adhere to a rather more 'conservative' stance on authorial intention than either Rattigan, Whiting or Christie. The implications of this view of authorial intention upon the interpretation of plays by actors and director in the course of preparing a production are addressed in Section 6.2.

In the generally relatively neglected area of Pinter's stagecraft, his use of props as a means of explicating character relationships is perhaps one of the great (so far) undisturbed areas of Pinter scholarship. In his statements comparing his use of glassware with Wolfit's sweep of a cloak, quoted in Chapter 4, Pinter himself has drawn attention to the great importance which his characters' possession, desertion and destruction of props has in his dramaturgy. To an audience perhaps the most immediately obvious use of stage properties in Pinter's work is as a means of articulating or emphasising character relationships, and most specifically those in which a struggle for authority is taking place. Braunmuller has noted that Pinter's characters use objects as instruments of aggression, as in *The Homecoming*, where even such prosaic articles as a cheese roll or a glass of water may be turned into badges of territorial advantage.[81] This degree of territorialism is apparent in an exchange from *The Homecoming* already discussed in Chapter 5, that between Lenny and Ruth early in Act 1. We have already noted the way in

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[81] Braunmuller, *op.cit.*, p.157.

which Lenny uses his monologues about the prostitute and the old lady with the mangle to discomfit Ruth in what are already alien surroundings. Though Lenny may think that these speeches are enough to place him in control of both Ruth and the room in which they sit, his attempt to cement his control of the situation falters when he tries to relieve Ruth of her glass of water.

> Lenny: Just give me the glass.
> Ruth: No.
> *Pause*
> Lenny: I'll take it, then.
> Ruth: If you take the glass... I'll take you.
> ....
> *She stands, moves to him with the glass.*
> Ruth: Put your head back and open your mouth.... Lie on the floor. Go on. I'll pour it down your throat.[82]

Ruth uses the glass of water both as a tool with which she can control the threat posed by Lenny, and as a symbol of the room itself: whoever gains the glass gains the room. By wresting control of the glass from Lenny, using it to threaten him, then drinking its contents, Ruth establishes herself higher in the familial pecking order than Lenny. She is thus able to leave the room. Teddy's theft of Lenny's cheese roll is equally an example of a character's use of an inanimate object to gain some sort of advantage over another character, but is attempted from a rather weaker position of attack. Lenny has not long before seemingly seduced Ruth, kissing her in front of Teddy. Teddy's brazen act may as a result be seen as a rather skewed form of revenge: Lenny takes Teddy's wife, Teddy takes Lenny's cheese roll.[83] Pinter thus not only uses the object as a means of dramatising the conflict between the two brothers, but also starkly demonstrates the primitive level on which they view women. Ruth by her comparison with the cheese roll is reduced to the status of 'object' or possession, an instance of what Ronald Knowles has described as 'parallel signification', where a character's use of an object functions as a non-verbal means of expressing, magnifying or problematising their relationship with another character.[84] At no other time in *The Homecoming* is it quite so clear that, on the one hand, the male characters regard Ruth as a disposable item

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[82] Pinter, *The Homecoming*, p.42.

[83] *ibid.*, pp.71-72.

[84] Knowles, R., 'Theorizing Pinter's Plays', *Essays in Poetics*, 21(1996), p.164.

which may be transferred among owners, and on the other, the degree to which Lenny and Teddy are prepared to injure each other in their desire for dominance in their relationship. The cheese roll is used as 'externalised subtext', acting as the channel through which Teddy and Lenny are able to express, however limited and veiled that expression may be, their hostility towards each other at that moment.

Drinking, and the preparation of beverages, occupy a significant position in the roll call of Pinter's prop usage, precisely because so many plays have at least one scene in which drinks of some description play a part. Even as early as *The Collection* the offering and taking of drinks is utilised in the dramaturgy: James helps himself to Harry's drinks cabinet in his first interview with Bill in an attempt to gain a territorial and authoritative advantage prior to interrogating Bill over his behaviour in Leeds during the previous week.[85] Often the preparation of drinks is specifically mentioned in the script; its very inclusion in the typically terse stage directions may be seen as an indicator of its importance to the playing of the scenes. Indeed, Harold Pinter has recounted that the alteration of one line in *Old Times* led to a complete re-evaluation of the handling of props:

> You'd be surprised the problems you can run into with coffee cups... I wrote one new line in rehearsal ... The line is "Yes, I remember." And that affected all the brandy and the coffee. It came in the middle of brandy and the coffee and affected the whole structure. In this play, the lifting of a coffee cup at the wrong moment can damage the next five minutes. As for the *sipping* of coffee, that can ruin the act.[86]

Though Pinter's comment here is partially flippant, he does nevertheless draw attention to two main points: that the directions involving the provision of drinks are carefully placed with regard to the dialogue, and that the unscripted, and therefore highly personalised, movements of the actor in sipping their drinks are also vital in their ability to help or hinder characterisation and plot movement. With regard to the first point, a brief examination of the scene early in *Old Times* involving the added line mentioned by Pinter indicates the way in which the movement towards a

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[85] Pinter, *The Collection*, pp.117-118.

[86] Pinter quoted in Gussow, *op.cit.*, p.33. Pinter appears to be referring to Kate's line, occurring almost immediately after Anna's entrance. See Pinter, *Old Times*, p.14.

drinks cabinet (or table) may be indicative of character relationships. Anna's first speech is peppered with appeals to Kate's memory of the London they knew as young women, finishing with a query as to whether that world still existed. Deeley's rebuff 'We rarely get to London' is followed by Kate's movement away from the sofa to a table to pour coffee.

> Kate: Yes, I remember.
> *She adds milk and sugar to one cup and takes it to Anna.* *She takes a black coffee to Deeley and then sits with her own.*
> Deeley: (*to Anna*) Do you drink brandy?[87]

Taken on a purely realistic level this short exchange may seem wholly unremarkable. Kate is perhaps being a good hostess: she takes the first cup of coffee to her guest; perhaps Anna takes milk and sugar while Deeley prefers his coffee black. However, the positioning of this action immediately after Anna's speech and Deeley's rebuff marks it with added significance. In standing up and moving to the coffee table Kate is in effect moving away from the site and the emotional engagement of her conversation with Deeley. She says to Anna that she remembers their time in London, thus negating Deeley's rebuff, and then provides Anna with a cup of coffee. Deeley's comes next, and without the added benefits of milk and sugar, an action that is potentially suggestive of her positioning of him as second in importance or authority at that moment. The dialogue without the coffee-making would not have the same potential significance for an audience, as neither would the activity without the dialogue. It is in the blending of the two that Pinter is able to suggest to an audience subtleties of characterisation that would otherwise not be possible.

Pinter's playscripts may specify in certain scenes that the characters are to prepare drinks, but does not specify the sipping of the drinks, leaving that activity to the discretion of the actor and director. This is an area in which the limits Pinter places upon his authorial privilege are most visible. Though, as we have noted in his comment quoted earlier, that Pinter considers even the sipping of a drink at an inappropriate moment as potentially seriously damaging to the life of the play, this most important of artistic decisions is

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[87] Pinter, *Old Times*, p.14.

not specified in the playscript. This limit to the prescriptiveness of Pinter's stage directions demonstrates that he is not only aware of the power inherent in the use of such props as glasses, but also the profound effects upon characterisation and interpretation that such activities may present for each actor in his/her individual exploration of their role. A brief examination of the pattern of drinking in two different productions of scene 1 of *Betrayal* illustrates this point. The promptbooks of both the 1978 and 1998 National Theatre productions of *Betrayal* include notations of when each character sipped their drink, an indication in itself of how important this activity was considered by the actors and directors of both productions. Pinter specifies twice in the first minute of the scene that the characters are to drink, both Emma and Jerry before the first line of dialogue, and Jerry only on the line "Cheers."[88] Only once more is there a direct direction to drink, and that is at the very end of the scene, when Emma drinks after the line "It's all all over."[89] There is, however, a punctuation in the middle of the scene where Jerry leaves the table for another round of drinks, thus suggesting that the actors should have drained their glasses by this point:

> Jerry: Darling.
> Emma: Don't say that.
> *Pause*
> It all ...
> Jerry: Seems such a long time ago.
> Emma: Does it?
> Jerry: Same again?
> *He takes the glasses, goes to the bar. She sits still.*[90]

It is at this point in the scene where we may see that differences in characters' drinking patterns may indicates differences in interpretation. In the 1978 production, Penelope Wilton's Emma drains her wineglass after "Does it?" Michael Gambon drained his glass after asking "Same again," a movement that suggests that his asking her if she wanted another drink was a means of escaping from her after she refuses to accept any kind of renewal of his feelings for her: it is a defensive movement. By contrast, in the 1998 production Douglas Hodge's Jerry drains his glass first on the line "Seems

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[88] Pinter, *Betrayal*, p.162.

[89] *ibid.*, p.180.

[90] *ibid.*, p.171.

such a long time ago." Imogen Stubbs' Emma drained her glass quickly *after* his question "Same again," which suggests that his question, rather than being a defensive response to her rebuff of his emotions towards her, is a parrying attack. Neither interpretation of Jerry likes Emma's emotional rebuff, but only Hodge's Jerry places Emma on the defensive by forcing her to gulp her drink.

Through comparative analyses of different interpretations of the first scene of *Betrayal* we may also see the point at which criteria of Pinterian acting and prop usage coincide. It has already been noted that both promptbooks of *Betrayal* are relatively minute in their notations of character movements: the 1978 book even notes points at which characters break eye contact.[91] This degree of care over movement, particularly in the 1978 promptbook, is an indication of the correlation between prop usage and stillness in *Betrayal* Scene 1, and is corroborated both by reviews of the production and by the movie of *The Homecoming*, also directed by Peter Hall.[92] In the scene between Lenny and Ruth regarding the glass of water in this movie version of Pinter's play, there is no extraneous movement. Both actors direct their lines, unmoving, to the glass of water, which is in the foreground of the shot: the stillness is compelling, so that when the shot changes and Ruth picks up the glass, there can be no doubt that her possession of it is indicative of her dominance in the situation. By contrast, in the 1998 production of *Betrayal*, the positioning of the sipping of the drinks in relation to the dialogue, though still important, was made less a focus of audience attention in the scene. Douglas Hodge's Jerry was a stark contrast to Hall's characters in *The Homecoming*: his constant changes of posture and mobility of body language to some extent supplanted the significance of the drink he held. The difference in acting styles between the Hall productions as typified in the movie adaptation of *The Homecoming* and Nunn's 1998 production of *Betrayal* may perhaps be an indicator of a metamorphosis in the criteria

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[91] As in Scene 1, when Emma breaks eye contact with Jerry after he says "Darling," prior to her line "Don't say that."

[92] As seen with John Elsom's reaction in *The Listener*: "[Hall's production] fails to make the most of the play. Over the past two or three years we have seen two Kevin Billington productions of Pinter's *The Caretaker* and *The Homecoming* which revealed how much was lost from the scripts in the pursuit of a kind of Ingmar Bergman high-style." Elsom quoted in Page, *File on Pinter*, p.57.

required to act Pinter. In previous decades Hall's extremely still and choreographed stage pictures may have only been a temporary criterion in the Pinter paradigm, becoming gradually less important as audiences gradually become accustomed to other elements of Pinter's stagecraft and writing technique; audiences may now be sufficiently attuned to the power plays between characters that such heavily choreographed sequences as that between Lenny and Ruth may now be simply unnecessary. It is to be hoped that in the near future a comparative analysis of productions of Pinter plays over the years be undertaken, as it may prove to be a useful index of the audience acceptance (or otherwise) of Pinter's work.

As with prop usage, Pinter's finely tuned spatial awareness is another indicator of his stance on authorial privilege. Most of each character's moves around the sets of the plays are actually written into the script by Pinter, and are incredibly precise, as Peter Hall recognises:

> Pinter has got a terrific selectivity about physical life on the stage. His stage directions, if he needs to give them, about where people move and what they do, are extremely precise, and if he doesn't give them, it's just as well to assume nothing is necessary.[93]

The prompt book for the National Theatre's 1978 production of *Betrayal* is remarkable for the tiny number of additional spatial moves added into the script (these additions were in pen on a typed copy of the playscript): when the characters moved across the set, in the vast majority of cases they did so precisely as Pinter had envisaged while writing the play, long before the beginning of rehearsals. Other than movements necessitated by changes of setting at the end of each scene, the only significant addition made to the prompt book occurs in Scene Two, where Jerry sits down just prior to apologising to Robert and wondering why Emma had told him of their affair. Just as with similarly rare additions or alterations to the dialogue of the play, this additional stage direction now resides in the published playscript.[94]

As noted above with prop usage, within the precision of his stage directions Pinter nevertheless leaves plenty of scope for directorial interpretation. For

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[93] Hall, *op.cit.*, p.8.

[94] National Theatre 1978 prompt book *Betrayal*, stage managed by Diana Boddington; Pinter, *Betrayal*, p.184.

example, in *The Collection* during the scenes in Harry's house, Stella is frequently onstage alone in her flat caressing her white kitten.[95] Martin Esslin interprets her presence onstage as signifying her loneliness and abandonment by the other characters:

> And so one point which emerges very strongly in performance – and may perhaps be overlooked in merely reading the text – is that the play highlights the tragedy of a woman in a world where the men tend to be more interested in each other than in the other sex.[96]

Whether or not this was the interpretation intended to be conveyed by Peter Hall, Harold Pinter and the actors in the 1962 RSC production of the play is now lost to us. What is important to note, however, is that this is but one possible interpretation of Stella's silent occupancy of her flat, and which is peculiarly masculine in its assumption that Stella is somehow not completely happy or fulfilled (either emotionally or sexually) until her room is occupied by a male intruder. Such an assertion assumes that Pinter is in this play adhering to his early maxim that a person in a room is waiting for an unwelcome and potentially dangerous intruder. This situation, however, occurs only once in *The Collection*, when Harry visits Stella, but she handles the situation in such a way as to satisfy Harry as well as provide herself with a means of maintaining her advantage over James. The more significant element in interpreting Stella's characterisation is her silence, especially at the end of the play, a problematic notion particularly for literary critics: a silent character in a sense disappears from the page as their lack of utterance denies not only their physical word-based existence but also their thought-processes. Onstage, however, a silent character may exhibit a far more potent presence to an audience than the word-based absence would suggest. This is certainly the case in the final scene of *The Collection* where, having returned from Harry's house after Bill's final admission about events at Leeds, James fails to elicit any response to his demands for verification:

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[95] e.g. Pinter, H., *The Collection*, p.115. Stella does not leave the stage until p.118. Similarly, Stella enters the flat to answer a phone call from Harry on p.133, and is alone there until the end of the following page. After Harry leaves, she is once again left alone in half light (p.138) until James returns on p.145.

[96] Esslin, M., *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p.254.

> James: You just sat and talked about what you would do if you went to your room. That's what you did.
> *Pause*
> Didn't you?
> *Pause*
> That's the truth...isn't it?
> *Stella looks at him, neither confirming nor denying. Her face is friendly, sympathetic.*[97]

Stella's silence in this scene is not passive, as perhaps might be thought upon simply reading the playscript. It is, in fact, a spur to James' shock and uncertainty over the number of versions he has heard of what Stella and Bill may have done in Leeds. He wants the truth, a commodity which she is not prepared to divulge, a situation which, as Gale points out, neatly mirrors their first appearance together onstage, where he refuses to answer her questions or even acknowledge her presence. Stella refuses to answer James because the information gives her power: she is now in control of the relationship, and only her 'sympathetic' face at the end of the play suggests that she intends to use her dominance benignantly.[98] Such an interpretation of the final scene strongly influences interpretation of earlier episodes where Stella is alone in the flat. Her presence there in this interpretation cannot be the passive role of deserted wife. She is, rather, an active player in the machinations involving the other characters; indeed, it may be said that she is their initiator. Her time alone in the flat, therefore, may be one of anxiousness, waiting for the outcome of James' meeting with Bill; it may be instead relaxed, as she lets the men under her power destroy themselves in petty battles over the 'truth' about Leeds. Any of these different actions may be utilised by an actress and director in production, as they all may be upheld by the surrounding action.

Pinter's set descriptions are the third major area which demonstrate the high degree of control he exerts over all elements of the stage pictures of his plays. Sets for Pinter plays have long been recognised for the unrelenting spareness of their design; increasingly non-realistic in appearance, in the words of American director Carey Perloff, they are "distilled" representations of reality, thus paralleling the precision of detail recognisable in Pinter's

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[97] Pinter, *The Collection*, p.145.

[98] Gale, *Butter's Going Up*, p.127.

dialogue. Perloff uses as an example of this pared-down approach to reality her own production of *The Birthday Party*, in which pools of light were used to define the acting area; only minimal furnishings and necessary set pieces such as the kitchen hatch were included in the design.[99] This distillation of settings to purely necessary or functional elements originates in Pinter's own terse set descriptions at the beginning of his playscripts, as in these few lines at the beginning of *Old Times*:

> A converted farmhouse
> A long window up centre. Bedroom door up left. Front door up right.
> Spare modern furniture
> Two sofas. An armchair.[100]

While in earlier plays Pinter was often precise in his positioning of set elements, such as the staircase, archway and dresser in *The Homecoming*, in his most recent plays set descriptions become even less specific than previously: after *No Man's Land* he does not again specify precise positioning of set items using traditional 'up left' stage terminology. For example, the scenes comprising *Betrayal* are introduced simply by headings: "Pub. 1977. Spring."[101] The setting of *One for the Road* – a desk and a doorway – must be intuited from the opening stage descriptions of the play, while the directions in *Moonlight* suggest a movement away from even the most simple of realistic movements, a character's entry into a room:

> *Fred's bedroom.*
> *Fred in bed. Jake in to him.*[102]

After a reversion to a more explicit set description in the published text of *Ashes to Ashes*, with his latest play *Celebration* Pinter has done away with set descriptions altogether, leaving the dressing of the stage entirely to the control of the designer and director. The degree to which even Pinter's more expansive set instructions may be interpreted visually by set designers is indicated by the photographs of two productions of *Old Times*, Figures 6.2 and 6.3. Though the first photograph, which depicts the premiere production

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[99] Perloff, 'Pinter in Rehearsal' in Burkman & Kundert-Gibbs, *Pinter at Sixty*, p.10.

[100] Pinter, *Old Times*, p.2.

[101] *ibid.*, p.161.

[102] Pinter, *Moonlight*, p.6.

Figure 6.2 *Old Times* designed by John Bury.[103]

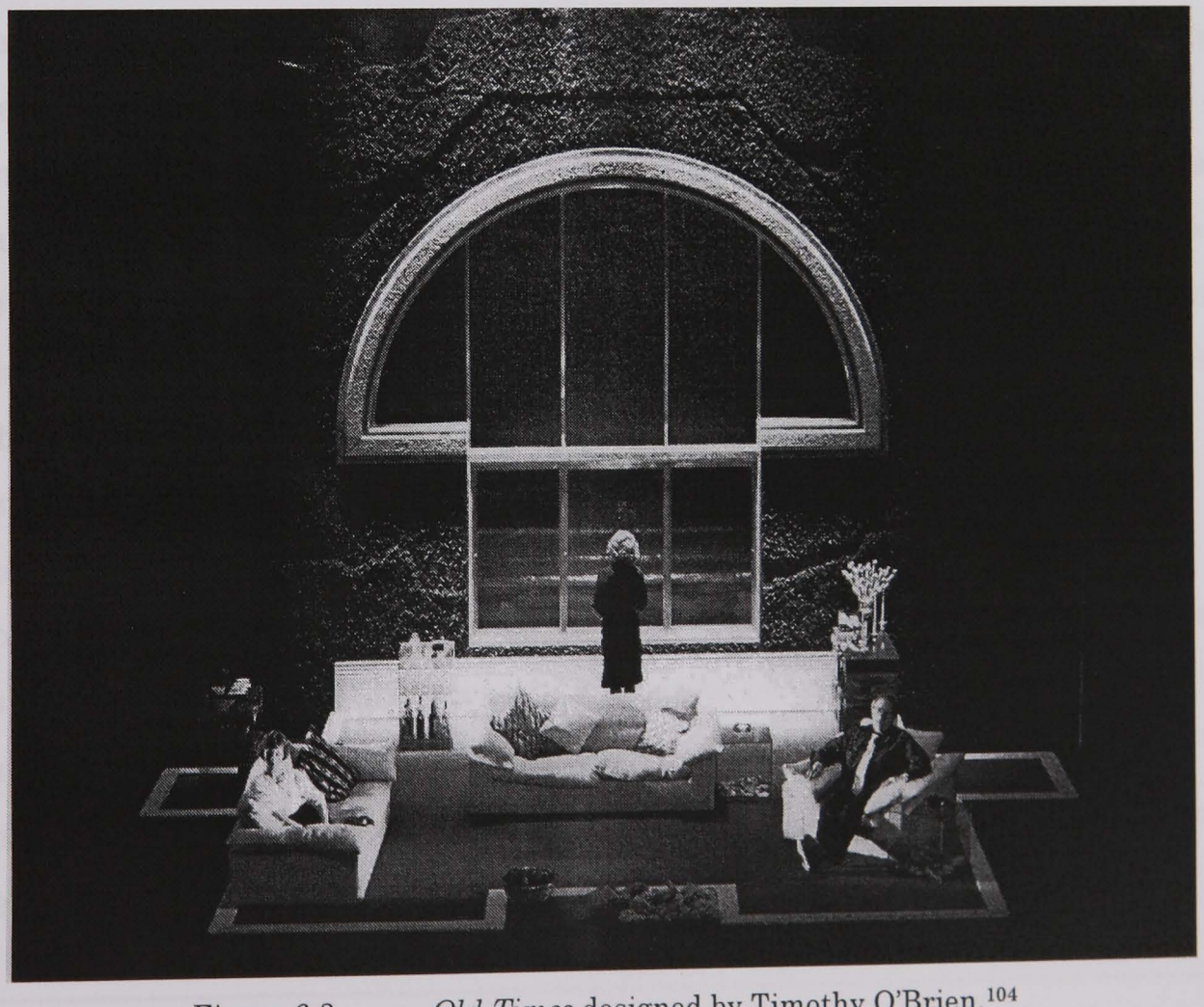

Figure 6.3 *Old Times* designed by Timothy O'Brien.[104]

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[103] Taken from Peacock, *op.cit.*, p.109.

in 1971 by the Royal Shakespeare Company and designed by John Bury, shows in the background some of the 'skeletal' structure of the walls which at the time were considered 'non-realistic' and bounded the comfortably modish furniture of the period, it appears in comparison to Figure 6.3 to be relatively realistic in composition. This second photograph, depicting the set of the 1985 revival of the play designed by Timothy O'Brien, is simultaneously both more sumptuous and more deliberately non-realistic than Bury's set, with its clinical white sofas and clear perspex coffee table and drinks cabinet. As Clare Colvin recognised when reviewing the production, this directly affects the way in which the audience reacts to the content of the play:

> The room, with its dark cork walls, sterile furniture, and oddly shaped window, does not look real, and anything that happens in it also takes on an air of unreality. Instead of the original Peter Hall concept of an ordinariness that becomes out of joint, David Jones, the director, has chosen a setting that lends itself to enigma...[105]

Colvin's comment draws a direct link between the non-realism of Pinter sets – and therefore Pinter's own conception of the settings – and the audience reception to the works: more non-realistic the set, the less likely the audience are to expect the play to provide the verifiable truths, unitary characters and guaranteed closure of West End-like realism. The suggestion that settings of Pinter plays are a visual correlative for the indeterminacy of character was made explicit by Pinter's recent revival of *The Room* as a 'curtain-raiser' to his new play *Celebration*. *The Room* was played in a startlingly solid-looking box set, with working stove and sink; the smell of cooking assaulted the noses of those audience members seated at the front of the stalls. Most instructively, however, if one remained seated during the interval one saw this 'solid' set dismantled and carried away, replaced by the austere sophistication of the restaurant set of *Celebration*. What became evident as a result of this transformation was that, despite the similarities of thematic material and language use between the two plays, the vicious amorality of the characters of the latter play was informed and strengthened by the non-specifity of the set which they inhabited. No character owned the space,

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[104] Taken from Goodwin, *op.cit.*, p.35.

[105] Colvin, C., review from *Plays and Players*, June 1985, quoted in Page, *File on Pinter*, p.47.

making it all available to be fought over by all the characters. The choice of a restaurant setting made this understanding all the more stark, as in a restaurant one pays not only for the food but for the privilege of temporarily owning table space and free use of the toilet facilities. The characters of *Celebration* are denied the superficial and illusory comfort Rose has in the ownership of her space. In contrast even to the characters of *Old Times* or *Ashes to Ashes*, Rose can assuage her fears in the little activities of reality – cooking and cleaning, and so on – while Deeley, Rebecca and Devlin have only their drinks cabinets in which to hide their anxieties and prepare their next attacks. There is no escape from the conflict for either characters or audience. There are no realistic touches, no food to watch cooking or period detail (gas meters etc.) to wonder over. Everything that appears in a late Pinter room is there because it is to be fought over or used in the course of battle. There are no distractions or comforts.

The deliberate non-specificity and non-realism of Pinter sets also has a decided impact upon the way in which we must view Pinter's work in terms of its relationship to naturalistic stage technique. In earlier plays such as *The Caretaker* Pinter used the rooms his characters inhabited in a more traditionally naturalistic way as a means of providing characterisational detail. Aston's junk-filled room, for example, could be construed as a visual correlative of his disordered thought processes in the same way that the kitchen of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* is intended as a symbolic representation of the eponymous character's heightened emotional and sexual state. It is, however, increasingly the case after *The Caretaker* that the rooms which the characters inhabit are intended not to provide any particular clues as to the emotional or mental state of any of the characters. Rather, the characters are divorced from their surroundings by the lack of personal detail present. For example, John Bury's set of *The Homecoming*, pictured in Figure 6.4 and used in the Peter Hall movie adaptation, is virtually monochrome, with no distinguishing ornaments or personal belongings of any kind visible on the battleship-grey sideboard or the table. Lenny and his family have made only one significant alteration to their physical environment: the structural alterations to create the archway, a change which only serves to heighten the absence of human comfort in the room. The desolation of the stage environment may be viewed by the audience as a metaphoric indicator of

Figure 6.4 *The Homecoming* designed by John Bury.[106]

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[106] Taken from Gussow, M., 'The Prime of Harold Pinter', *American Theatre*, March 1994, p.18.

the hostility existing between the characters, but cannot be viewed as being illustrative of character in any other sense. Pinter's choice of a restaurant setting for *Celebration* furthers the deterioration of the concept of character portrayal through environment, as the characters of this play inhabit a space which by its nature is intended not to contain personal touches: even the waiting staff are merely temporary inhabitants of the space. The setting of the play in a public space, through its divorce of character and environment, in fact serves to emphasise what is perhaps the most realistic element of Pinter's stage technique: his creation of stage characters and situations which mirror the ways in which audience members may eavesdrop upon conversations and situations between strangers. In such a situation, generally in a public place, the listener is not given the benefit of external environmental assistance in assessing the characters of the overheard interlocutors, any more than their conversation will be likely to contain supplementary expository detail so that strangers may follow their conversation more easily. In this respect, the strict austerity of Pinter's settings may be seen to be precisely on a par with his textual preoccupations.

6.2 Consequences of incommensurability: producing Pinter

> Pinter's 'mask' which disguises man's fundamental insecurity ... continues to cause frustration for actors and directors trained for a theatre that thrives on realism and an acting methodology created to serve primarily a realistic theatre tradition.[107]

There are two conflicting problems that a director must address when preparing to produce a Pinter play. The first is the apparent latitude given to the actors in the characterisation of the roles, provided as a result of the multiplicities of character 'motivation' and the lack of narrative closure implicit in many of the plots. Does a director present multiplicities, and if so, how? If not, how is a director to decide which meanings should be emphasised at which times, when traditional forms of textual analysis such as the Grebanier/Price method are inapplicable, as was noted in Chapter 5. Taking up these points, Nigel Dennis suggested that Pinter's works are little better

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[107] McTeague, *op.cit.*, p.xiii.

than acting school exercises in which a simple piece of text is used as a vehicle for trying out various motivations and emotional states: that virtually any meaning or motivation may be attached to Pinter's text.[108] In other words, Dennis alleges that Pinter's plays are absent of any kind of authorial intention or overall action or 'meaning'; that the words in the playscript are merely empty signifiers. Richard Schechner has gone so far as to say that:

> The plays – as aesthetic entities – are completed, but the conceptual matrices out of which the action arises are left gaping.[109]

By contrast, the examinations of Pinter's stagecraft in the previous section of this chapter present the image of a playwright who very much cares about every aspect of the process by which his works are produced for the stage. Like Beckett, Gray, Wesker and many other contemporary playwrights, Pinter has increasingly taken an active role in the productions of his plays, either directing them himself, as with *Ashes to Ashes* and *Celebration*, or by making himself available to the director and cast as an advisor for a number of rehearsals.[110] This desire for close authorial control appears to have originated in Pinter's well-publicised argument over Luchino Visconti's interpretation of *Old Times* in Rome in 1973, and led to his comment upon his direction of the premiere of *Mountain Language* at the National Theatre in 1988: "I did this one just to make sure it was done right the first time."[111] The quest for any prospective director of a Pinter play is how to reconcile these two apparently completely opposing views, creating a production that is 'open' in meaning while still conforming at some level with the strictures Pinter imposes upon physical elements of the production at a textual level. The apparent conflict between liberality and conservatism implicit in Pinter's stagecraft suggests that Pinter's work moves away from traditional forms and notions of authorial intention and resultant textual fidelity amongst practitioners, creating new criteria by which the faithfulness of an interpretation to Pinter's text may be considered. After a brief discussion of

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[108] Dennis, *op.cit.*, p.22.

[109] Schechner, *op.cit.*, p.177.

[110] Since *The Hothouse* was first produced in 1980, Pinter has directed all but two premieres of his plays. Naismith, *Harold Pinter*, London, 2000, pp.192-194.

[111] Pinter quoted in Merritt, *Pinter in Play*, p.19.

changes in the concept of directorial interpretation, this section explores areas in which Pinter's new criteria on faithful interpretation may be discerned.

Textual fidelity and authorial intention became topics of contention with the rise of the professional director at the beginning of the 20th century.[112] Latterly, however, the calling into question of the privileged position of the author and authorial intention by such writers as Barthes and Foucault has further complicated the question of the director's responsibility to the text and playwright being produced.[113] Previously, this question had been a relatively clear-cut argument over how much or little the director was entitled to depart from 'the spirit of the play' (or the author's intended meaning) in its interpretation and production. This question of textual fidelity hinged on the assumption of the synonymity of the contents of the playscript and the author's meanings and intentions. Arnold Wesker has described the playwright's contribution as the imaginative collection and ordering of primary sources, that is, his/her experiences of life; the director's work, by extension, is secondary material based upon the thoughts and emotions inherent in the primary work.[114] Direction of a work, then, would fall somewhere on a continuum of interpretive positions, ranging from conservative to radical, but in all cases with the recognition that interpretation is a necessary part of the production process.[115] Those who criticised, for example, Brook's 1971 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for not allowing the text to 'speak for itself' were failing to realise that the very acts of casting a play, and choosing sets and costumes, let alone the direction of the actors, necessitate choices that enforce some degree of interpretation of the contents of the playscript, whether that interpretation is intentional or

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[112] cf. Shaw, G.B., 'Shaw's Rules for Directors', *Theatre Arts*, August 1949, p.6: "The most desirable director of a play is the author."

[113] Barthes, R., 'The Death of the Author' in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. R. Howard, Oxford, pp.49-55; Foucault, M., 'What is an Author? in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. D.F. Bouchard & S. Simon, 1977, pp.113-138.

[114] Wesker, A., 'Interpretation: to Impose or Explain', *Performing Arts Journal*, 32, Vol. 11 no.2. p.63f.

[115] Benedetti, *The Director at Work*, pp.13-16.

not.[116] The playscript is a "symbolic notation" only, which does not 'represent' but *implies* the play in production:

> No script is, in itself, a complete play. We can't just "do" the script onstage. The process of production might be called a "transformation" of the script. Or one might approach from the opposite direction and describe the process as the "completion of the play." Whatever it is called, it is both an interpretative and a creative task.[117]

Writers such as Robert Benedetti constructed criteria by which interpretations could be recognised as valid or otherwise, based upon the idea of a 'commonality of norms'. This commonality may be described as the quality of 'Hamletness' that unites different productions and interpretations of Shakespeare's play, and comprises elements of the script created by the playwright: language, metaphor, action, given circumstance and creation of character.[118] In this way the fundamental elements of a playwright's work on a script are linked to a means of evaluating the success of an interpretation: if the production fails to recognisably portray one of the criteria listed above, created by the playwright, then the interpretation is considered to be invalid.

The severing of the link between the playscript and the author's intended meanings has considerably widened the debate over interpretative freedom. Queries are now raised over definitions of text, for if a playscript is no longer considered to contain privileged access to a playwright's intentions, it is open to question what precisely may be considered its constituents, especially in the greyer areas of stage directions and other playwright's directions outside of the dialogue. Additionally, writers such as Arnold Wesker have wondered if the limits of interpretation are narrowed when producing the work of a living playwright who is able to express opinions and intentions clearly and audibly.[119] Perhaps most importantly, the divorce of playscript from authorial intention has rendered the evaluation of interpretations more difficult, as the

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[116] See Jonathan Miller quoted in Berry, R., *On Directing Shakespeare*, London, 1977, p.9.

[117] Gross, *Understanding Playscripts*, pp.11, 4-5.

[118] Benedetti, *op.cit.*, pp.20-21.

[119] Wesker, 'Interpretation: to Impose or Explain', p.66; Luere, J., ed., *Playwright Versus Director: Authorial Intentions and Performance Interpretations*, Westport, 1994, pp.99-104, p.40; Billington, M., 'Plays for Today', *The Guardian*, 1 September 1999, http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,3897428,00.html.

choice is no longer simply between fidelity to text (and therefore intention) and infidelity. These concerns are ably illustrated by the 1984 American Repertory Theatre (ART) production of Beckett's *Endgame* and the 1994 Deborah Warner production of *Footfalls*. The 1984 ART production of *Endgame* was closed after threats of legal proceedings from Beckett, who was deeply upset over director Akalaitis' decision to set the play in a burnt-out subway, while The Beckett Estate closed Warner's 1994 production of *Footfalls* over a similar departure from Beckett's stage directions.[120]

While Wesker concedes that in the case of classics a certain amount of interpretive freedom is entailed by the distance in time between performances as a result of such factors as societal changes across generations, the cases of the above plays demonstrate that in the case of 'contemporary classics', even those of some forty or fifty years' longevity, interpretive freedom is conditional upon the wishes of the playwright (or his estate).[121] The interventions made in the cases of the productions of *Endgame* and *Footfalls* are indicative of the re-evaluation that must be made of the concept of 'text' in contemporary discussions of interpretation. Though the changes made to each play may seem at first to be minimal – the alteration of the setting in the first play and the change of choreography from stage-bound to something more peripatetic in the second – they are alterations which, as Kalb recognises, cut to the innovative heart of Beckett's dramaturgy:

> Imagine creating an artwork that conspicuously breaks out of a certain established mold, and then seeing it reduced back to that mold ... It is the rare director who understands that the plays... involve a presentational concern with the impossibility of making believable, event-filled plots at all.[122]

By the alteration of apparently innocuous stage directions, Akalaitis and Warner had in effect removed from Beckett's work a feature that distinguishes it from other works; like Pinter, Beckett has created a paradigm in which one of the constituent criteria is the fundamental importance of Beckett's control of the stage picture, as for example in

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[120] Kalb, J., 'The Question of Beckett's Context', *Performing Arts Journal*, 32 (Vol XI no.2), p.33; Billington, 'Plays for Today'.

[121] Wesker, 'Interpretation: to Impose or Explain', p.66.

[122] Kalb, *op.cit.*, p.33.

Footfalls or *What Where*, in which the physical landscape and the privations of the actor/character are the fundamental means by which Beckett dramatises the futility and necessity of existence.[123] This is incommensurable with a West End paradigmatic approach to stage directions, in which published directions are usually devalued as being the notation of the movements of one particular production, and therefore relevant only to that production.[124]

This point of congruence between Beckett and Pinter is an indicator of one of the first criteria of interpretive freedom in Pinter's works: that the stage directions, far from being an adjunct to the text, are in fact an essential part of it. That this is so is suggested by Pinter's own experience of a directorial dispute, the already-mentioned disagreement with Visconti over *Old Times* in 1973; Pinter's most-quoted outbursts against Visconti's direction are not to deplore radical changes of dialogue, but rather dispute Visconti's casual manner with the play's stage directions:

> I have never heard of or witnessed a production such as this which... introduces such grave and shocking distortions which I consider a travesty. I did not write a play about two lesbians who caress each other continually ... I did not write a scene about a man masturbating his wife ... All the sexual acts I have referred to are not only inexpressibly vulgar in themselves but are totally against the spirit and intention.[125]

That Pinter's dialogue may be accorded something of the status of an 'open text' interpretationally speaking makes this insistence on the authorial integrity of the stage directions all the more stark. Nigel Dennis, it must be recalled, commented that Pinter's dialogue is "virtually meaningless in thought and intellect," but when placed in the hands of capable actors can be made replete with any significance that is felt to be appropriate or desirable. This view of the openness of interpretation in even the earliest of Pinter's plays is confirmed by a recent reviewer of *The Birthday Party*, who implied

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[123] *ibid.*, pp.27, 30.

[124] "Many plays in published forms are 'acting editions'. It is right that a play which has been performed should have that performance documented: it has become a work of literature containing descriptions of action and movement... A production is unique, an acutely personal matter, relative to those who create it, so the only thing a company can usefully derive from an acting edition is a general impression." Morrison, *Directing in the Theatre*, London, 1973, p.69.

[125] Pinter quoted in Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*, pp.237-238.

the absence of any one preferable or 'definitive' interpretation of the play in the comment that "it's part of the point of the play that you'll want to argue with any interpretation."[126] To be fair, Dennis' assessment of the openness of interpretation available in Pinter's scripts is touched by hyperbole, for the placement of such a piece of text as Dennis quotes from *Silence* in the wider context of the surrounding dialogue must place some limits, however sketchy, to the expanse of interpretive options available to the actor. It is, however, the relationship between the dialogue and the physical surroundings codified in the stage directions that provide the anchor that the dialogue needs if it is to avoid the danger of being, like acting-exercise dialogues, capable of carrying any meaning and therefore to all intents and purposes meaningless. Pinter's stage directions function in effect as the blueprints to the choreography of the stage action – 'action' being used in its fullest sense, for Pinter re-unites the two most common theatrical uses of the term. It is in activity that the conceptual action is most decisively sited: in plays such as *Old Times* it is the possession of props and floor space that are the overt signals of the progress of power relationships between characters. For example, when in *Old Times* Deeley copies Kate's move across to a cigarette box, only to have it removed from his grasp and taken over to a seated Anna, the audience can be in little doubt that Deeley's action was intended to be a complimentary mimic of Kate, and her removal of the cigarette box to Anna a repudiation of Deeley's gesture and an invitation to Anna to better it.[127]

A key criterion, then, for the evaluation of direction of a Pinter play is the director's recognition of the privileged position of the stage directions within the text. Also to be considered by both director and would-be evaluators, however, is actress Lindsay Duncan's comment that Pinter as a director considers nothing to be "set in stone." This would appear to suggest that Pinter is not averse to liberal rendering of and additions to his stage directions, so long as any alterations made are not so injudicious as to alter the action choreographed within them. Similarly, it would be injudicious for an actor to attempt (or a director to attempt) any characterisation which

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[126] Clapp, S., *op.cit.*, p.8; Dennis, *op.cit.*, p.22.

[127] Pinter, *Old Times*, pp.30-31.

would cause the delivery of the dialogue to contradict the action implicit in the physical choreography. For example, in the cigarette box from *Old Times* it would be difficult for an actor to justify a delivery of the line accompanying the mimicry of Kate's move to the box which suggested that Deeley did not wish to compliment Kate and gain her favourable attention: this would not only contradict the movement Deeley is making, but would also be contradictory to the play's overall action, which involves both Deeley and Anna vying for Kate.

Given an understanding of the importance of props and setting in Pinter's work, and given the boundaries placed upon both a director's and actor's interpretive freedom by the stage directions, it remains to be asked how a director is to present in production the multiplicities of characterisation and plot that are so much a part of Pinter's dramatic technique. Peter Hall's method for the plays up to and including *The Homecoming* was a process of layering:

> Now, actors can't play veiling until they know what they're veiling, so we play mockery, we play hatred, we play animosity... That stage of rehearsal is very crude, but it's a very important stage, because unless the actor understands what game he is playing, what his actual underlying motivations are, the ambiguity of the text will mean nothing. People who think that all you've got to do in Pinter is to say it, hold the pause and then say the next line, are wrong.[128]

While Hall is right to draw attention to the dangers of a purely external 'Pinter style' which concentrates solely on draining the voice of any revealing inflexion, our previous discussions on Pinterian acting – especially Pinter's own emphasis on rhythm in his recollections of rehearsals of *The Collection* – suggest that such complicated rehearsal processes are not strictly necessary. While there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that Pinter when directing other playwrights' work will encourage the presence of the playwright at rehearsals in order to assist actors with meanings and interpretation, it is also clear that when directing his own work such explanations are considered unhelpful to the rehearsal process. Television producer Louis Marks noted this difference between Pinter's direction of Simon Gray's *The Rear Column* and his own *The Hothouse*, both for BBC2:

> With *The Rear Column* Simon had always been on hand to talk about meanings, interpretations. With Harold, being Harold, there were no explanations. The lines were the lines. Just say them and they would work. There were no special ways to play the lines to make their meanings clearer. Harold had written them, acted them to himself and knew they would communicate themselves to the audience. As for the meaning of the play as a whole, this was never talked about...[129]

This being said, Pinter is still considered a director who is deeply concerned with enabling an actor to carry out their work with ease and an air of freedom. The main difference, perhaps, between Pinter and other directors is his greater pre-occupation with the technical aspects of delivering lines rather than on discussions on motivations. This impression of Pinter's directorial style is confirmed by Lindsay Duncan's comments upon the rehearsals of *Celebration*:

> As a director, he will let things just run for a long time. We rehearse at first on quite a superficial level because he likes to see the whole. He'll let you go for ages with a wrong emphasis, or something, simply to see or to let you alone... He'll finally correct that emphasis with... 'I think you'll find if you do it like this, it will work better.'[130]

According to Duncan and fellow actress Lia Williams, Pinter's approach is to allow the actors to explore the text by allowing them to experience the action in macroscopic terms, waiting to see if such exposure to the script in its entirety will produce interesting and useful characterisations. Pinter does not dictate approaches, rather, he concentrates upon "detail and clarity": the ordering of actor's contributions and the clarification of action to ensure that the fluctuations in motivational impulse of each character are given opportunities to be displayed to the audience. The relaxed nature of this directorial approach leaves the actors free to experiment with characterisation, guiding and advising rather than advocating any one line of interpretation. Responsibility for the discovery and portrayal of the multiplicities inherent in each characterisation is given primarily to the actor, while the responsibility for the positioning of these multiplicities so as to ensure non-verifiability of truth and multiplicity of plot is left to the more

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[128] Hall, 'Directing Pinter', p.6.

[129] Louis Marks in Eyre, R. et.al., *Pinter: A Celebration*, London, 2000, pp.35-36. See also Gray, S., *An Unnatural Pursuit*, London, 1985, p.56f.

[130] Bassett, K., 'Pinter's Women', *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 March 2000, Arts section, p.A7.

holistic view of the director. Cima, likening Pinter's plot multiplicities such as the truths about Leeds in *The Collection* to different camera angles upon one cinematic scene, suggests that the actor's task is to determine, "not the cause and effect narrative of the script, but the *nature* of the reality of the events in the plot." In other words, each actor in *The Collection* must decide for themselves which version of the Leeds story to hold as truth, though all four actors may decide on a different version. It is the director's task to encourage the actors in this task:

> Instead of clarifying the one "true" reading of the characters' relationships, the director assists each actor in deciding what camera angle he will take on each event, with the character's given circumstances changing upon every alteration in point of view.[131]

Cima's analogy is a useful one, for it gives a means of describing the director's task in shifting audience focus between the differing motivational and emotional states of each character. In *The Collection*, for example, when each new version of the Leeds story is revealed, it briefly becomes the lens through which the rest of the action is viewed, until either the introduction of a new version or the reintroduction of a previous Leeds story is used to 'change angles'. The director, so to speak, is the being in control of each 'camera lens', and must learn during the rehearsal process how to most effectively change between 'camera angles' in each scene.

It remains to be seen how the direction of Pinter plays will progress in the future. Certainly there have been developments in the style of direction, becoming freer and more liberal with both text and stage directions as time has progressed: it would now be highly unusual to hear of a director of Pinter holding a 'dot and pause' rehearsal, as Hall once did with the cast of *The Homecoming*. Just as Douglas Hodge's acting style in the 1998 *Betrayal* is rather more loose than the highly controlled stillness of the actors in the movie adaptation of Hall's *Homecoming*, so too are directors more prepared to experiment with the texts. The 1999 Theatre Royal Bath production of *The Birthday Party*, for example, emphasised the comedic elements of the dialogue by de-emphasising the weight of the pauses, thus speeding up the

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[131] Cima, *op.cit.*, p.250.

delivery of the lines.[132] Throughout this change, however, what remains clear is the necessity for productions of Pinter plays to hold fast to the fundamental principles that make the Pinter paradigm so distinctive, such as the non-verifiability of motivation and identity, and Pinter's absolute refusal to allow either himself or his audience to take partisan views of one character over another. Directors who fail to give adequate consideration to these principles are placing their productions into potential interpretational and commercial jeopardy.[133] If, however, the distinctiveness of Pinter's authorial voice is heeded, as David Hare notes of a recent revival of *The Homecoming*, the impact of the play upon an audience can be truly remarkable.

> Never for a moment was the audience allowed a get-out of doubting that something real and important was at stake ... The impact of this exceptional evening depended on Pinter keeping his guard high, so that he never once offered the spectator the easy handhold of an 'attitude' with which they might be able to take some simplified view of the events on the stage.[134]

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[132] Clapp, *op.cit.*

[133] Naismith notes that some productions seek to 'fill in the blanks' of history and motivation in plays such as *The Homecoming*, with unfortunate results. He gives as examples a production which assumed that Ruth was suffering from a mental disorder, and another which attempted to justify the conflict between the boys and their father by suggesting that the sons were victims of childhood abuse by Max. Naismith notes that the result of both interpolations was to make the play "very dark indeed", obscuring the play's humour and distorting its plot development. Naismith, *op.cit.*, p.152.

[134] David Hare in *Pinter: A Celebration*, p.19.

7. Afterword

The main function of the paradigm methodology as it has been described in this thesis is to provide a framework by means of which plays, playwrights and theatrical movements may be analysed and understood. Just as I have attempted with Pinter's work, practitioners may use paradigmatic analysis as a means of explicating a play and its staging requirements prior to production, while academics may open up new avenues of academic research. However, the paradigmatic analysis made on one playwright or set of works may also be used as a starting point from which to initiate study on plays which may be the work of unknown authors, or writers better known for their work under different paradigmatic criteria, but which nevertheless hold resonances with the works already analysed. This brand of comparative analysis may be particularly valuable in cases where a director, faced with a new playscript, must begin to formulate production ideas prior to rehearsals. For example, I believe that Arnold Wesker's latest play *Denial* may benefit from a comparative analysis with Pinter's work, even though under common wisdom the work of these two contemporary British playwrights are usually considered to be representative of two differing 20th century theatrical movements.[1] Briefly in this concluding section of my dissertation, I wish to conduct a small preliminary comparative analysis of Wesker's latest play *Denial* with the Pinter paradigm as a demonstration of how such an analysis may be beneficial to the understanding not simply of the work of Wesker, but of the relationship between Wesker and Pinter.

Denial, first produced in May 2000 by the Bristol Old Vic, may first appear to contain few similarities to Pinter's work, but in certain areas of construction, particularly of subject matter, also presents some fascinating and potentially revealing commonalities. On the page it first appears to be a standard thesis

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[1] In some respects the two were similarly treated as oddities unable to be neatly placed into any category; Taylor placed Wesker placed firmly in the category of social activism, suggesting that it was impossible to separate the work from the playwright, and while Pinter was connected by Esslin to the Theatre of the Absurd, Taylor in *Anger and After* devoted a whole chapter to Pinter alone, an indication both of Pinter's immediate importance in the critical realm and his position as a playwright difficult to pigeonhole. (Taylor, *Anger and After*, p.130.)

play: many of its characters seem to exist purely as representatives of particular points of view over the nature of memory and, more specifically, the veracity of the techniques used by therapists to 'recover' in adulthood memories of paedophilic abuse. Ziggy and Sandy, in particular, seem to have little function in the play other than as anti-thetical devices for the musings of other characters.[2] A closer examination of the methods used by Wesker to structure his subject matter, however, reveals elements which are reminiscent of Pinter's playwriting structure. The play combines a dramatisation of the consequences of a power battle between characters with the thematic element of the unreliability of memory, and like Pinter's *Old Times*, the primary prize over which the other characters fight is the person, memories and pleasant associations that are manifested in one other character, in this case the character Jenny. Wesker sets his investigation of the manifestations and manipulations of authoritarian structures in the milieu of a recently well-publicised and controversial area, that of the 'recovered' memory of childhood sexual abuse in adult life. *Denial* depicts the destruction of the cohesion of a middle-class family and its moral values when, aided by her therapist Valerie Morgan, Jenny alleges that her father Matthew was guilty of sexually abusing her in childhood, with the collusion of her mother Karen. Jenny becomes increasingly emotionally dependent upon Valerie as she becomes more convinced of her status as a victim of abuse, an ironic situation in the light of Valerie's early comment that "Victims need sorting out, healing. Victim-mentalities need a kick up the arse," as it is precisely this brand of mentality that the audience sees being fostered in Jenny.[3] Though Jenny protests to her family that her new-found identity as a survivor of child abuse gives her freedom, her relationship with Valerie in fact constitutes a new and subtle form of dependence, for not only is Valerie the guide to Jenny's 'knowledge' of her past, but also the paid assistant to Jenny's recovery from the trauma of this knowledge.[4] Having been encouraged to remember a new and

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[2] Billington, M., 'Never Trust a Therapist' [review of Wesker's *Denial*], *The Guardian*, 20 May 2000, http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4020052,00.html

[3] Wesker, A., *Denial*, Bristol, 2000, pp.65, 16.

[4] Though this point is not stressed in the play, the ability of 'recovered memory' survivors to pay their therapists' bills is an issue that can strongly influence the course of their treatment. Loftus and Ketcham recount a case in which, having lost job, her car and the backing from her insurance company to pay the therapist's bills, one patient was abandoned to a (US) state mental institution.

psychologically traumatic past which divorces her from her relations, Jenny has no option but to be emotionally dependent upon the therapist who instigated the procedure. Martin Conway notes that this phenomenon has been explored in psychological research:

> A constructed memory grounds the self. By this I mean that once a memory is constructed it constrains the range of possible selves and self-discrepancies that can be plausibly held by the current self. For instance, a patient who recalls an episode or episodes of abuse cannot maintain a possible self in which they were not a victim.[5]

On the one hand Wesker, perhaps influenced by his story material, attempts to dramatise the Pinter-like realisation that, whether or not the allegations are true, the consequences for family relations are unchanged: the family is destroyed and trust between family members dissolved. Indeed, the impact of the allegations upon the accused is such as to make them question their own innocence, searching for any incident that may have been either guilty or at least capable of misinterpretation. Just as with the different versions of the events in Leeds in *The Collection*, the audience have no means of verifying whether or not Jenny's allegations of childhood sexual abuse are correct: there may or may not have been an incinerator in the garden in the period during which she claims to have used it to dispose of a foetus fathered by her father.[6] It is precisely this aspect of False (or Recovered) Memory Syndrome (FMS) that is its prime point of controversy, for as we noted in Chapter 4 with the work of Roediger and McDermott, memory is both fallible and suggestible.[7] On the other hand, however, Wesker seems to wish to convey to the audience a clear understanding that FMS is a derided and dangerous swindle perpetrated on innocent families by unscrupulous (and possibly untrained) counsellors. His characterisation of Valerie neatly captures the essence of Wesker's conflict between portraying the unverifiable nature of memory and truth, and the more one-sided option of

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Ironically, this action was the turning point in her recovery, as it severed her bond with her therapist. See Loftus & Ketcham, *op.cit.*, pp.16-18.

[5] Conway, M., 'Introduction: What are Memories?' in *Recovered Memories and False Memories*, p.5.

[6] Wesker, *Denial*, p.48.

[7] See Schacter for discussions on the suggestibility of memory, both under hypnosis and by other means; e.g. Schacter, *op.cit.*, pp.103-107. Loftus and Ketcham note that alterations in stories of abuse which are described by believers in Repressed Memory Syndrome as being additional details submerged by 'repression' in the patient are more likely to be simply the result of normal distorting and remoulding which happens to all memory; Loftus, E. & Ketcham, K., *op.cit.* p.47.

decrying the psychological damage done in the name of 'self-help'. Wesker initially works to create a favourable impression of Valerie, with her appearance of maternal caring and her indignance at the violations of childhood trust she has witnessed through her career.[8] Increasingly during the course of the play, however, this initial portrait is eroded, partly through her own actions firstly in inducing Jenny to entertain notions of childhood abuse despite receiving no evidence from Jenny's sessions with her, and later in her interview with Jenny's sister Abigail; partly through the interviews made with Valerie by journalist Sandy, in which Valerie dodges any investigation into her own private life while appearing more interested in how she appears on camera than answering Sandy's questions; and partly through the venal descriptions made of her by other characters, especially Sandy.[9] Wesker's indecision about the thrust of his narrative structure, creates a conflict in the play that is most evident at its climax, when Matthew finally surprises Valerie and Jenny with a confession of guilt:

> I love, absolutely loved bathing them – splashing them, squirting them... Rubbing their poor little chapped thighs and groins with soothing oils. And as I did it I lingered over it, and looked into their eyes and kept bending down to kiss them ... Terrible – no? Oh, we tampered with them alright.[10]

Taken under the heavily anti-FMS conception of the plot, this speech is little more than a traditional plot reversal, in which everything that the audience has presumed to know about Matthew and Karen is proved untrue. By contrast, taken under the Pinter-like conception of the story as being an examination of the power relationships inherent in psychological dependence, this speech is a cunning subversion of the conventional run of such cases, in which part of the confirmation of the truth of such allegations is the consistent denial of the alleged perpetrator. In his 'confession' Matthew not only undercuts the authority of the therapist, but also reminds Jenny of how childhood memories can be enjoyable and treasured. Jenny is left at the end of this speech doubting her parents, but also now doubting her own memories of abuse and, most

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[8] Wesker, *Denial*, p.21. See also Billington, M., 'Never Trust a Therapist'

[9] Wesker, *Denial*, pp.33-39, 57-58, 15, 22, 61.

[10] *ibid.*, pp.73-74; 52-53.

importantly, doubting the infallibility and loyalty of Valerie, who seems unable at the end of the play to find a way of beginning to rebuild Jenny's trust.[11]

The significance of the results of this brief comparative analysis of *Denial* and the Pinter paradigm lies in its implications for production. The potential conflict between thesis play and Pinterian drama of authority, memory and language use is one that must be resolved before or during rehearsals, as it could have considerable impact upon the way in which the actors, particularly those playing Valerie and Matthew, decide to construct their characterisations. As we have seen, the character of Valerie almost functions as the front line of Wesker's indecision about what is to be the driving force of his play, and as such, the choice by an actress of an unsympathetic portrayal in the midst of a production that attempts a more Pinterian interpretation could destroy the balance of the production.

It is precisely the fact that implications for production and performance such as those discussed above may be derived from the paradigmatic methodology that forms its primary value as a means of analysis. Whether the methodology is utilised by a theatre practitioner, academic, student or member of the general public, it is my belief that the criteria comprising the methodology focus the analysis upon the play studied as a work of theatre, rather than as a work of literature. It is this holistic concentration upon not simply the playscript but the acting, direction, use of props and lighting, and all other elements that comprise the staging of the playscript that is its strength, and I hope may in the future contribute to the fuller understanding not simply of the work of playwrights, but of the theatre itself.

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[11] *ibid.*, p.75.

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Archival Material.

Promptbook — *Betrayal* 1978 National Theatre production.
Director: Peter Hall
Stage manager: Diana Boddington.

Promptbook — *Betrayal* 1998 National Theatre production
Director: Trevor Nunn
Stage Manager:Alison Rankin

Video — *Betrayal* 1998 National Theatre production
Reference number: VR126
Format: Fuji Super SHG-240
Date of recording: 8 December 1998.

All the above material is viewable by appointment; contact The Archivist, Royal National Theatre, South Bank, London, SE1 9PX

Video

Accident

Screenplay: Harold Pinter (based on novel by Nicholas Mosley)
Director: Joseph Losey
Producer: Joseph Losey, Norman Priggen
Cast includes: Dirk Bogarde, Michael York, Stanley Baker, Jacqueline Sassard, Vivien Merchant

©1967 London Independent Producers/Monarch

Betrayal

Screenplay: Harold Pinter
Director: David Jones
Producer: Sam Spiegel
Cast: Jeremy Irons, Patricia Hodge, Ben Kingsley

©1983 Horizon Productions VHS Video distributed by 4-Front Video, no. 0580543.

Denial

Film of 2000 Bristol Old Vic production.

Playwright: Arnold Wesker
Director (stage): Andy Hay
Director (video): Robin Lough
Producer: Bristol Old Vic/ Heritage Theatre Ltd/ Robert Marshall
Cast includes: Nicola Barber, Rosemary McHale, Jeremy Child, Susan Tracy

©2000 Bristol Old Vic/Heritage Theatre Ltd.
Video available from Bristol Old Vic.

The Homecoming

Film based on 1965 RSC production.

Screenplay: Harold Pinter
Director: Peter Hall
Producer: Ely Landau
Cast: Cyril Cusack, Ian Holm, Michael Jayston , Vivienne Merchant, Paul Rogers, Terence Rigby

©1973

The Knack... and how to get it

Screenplay: Charles Wood (based on Ann Jellicoe's play)
Director: Richard Lester
Producer: Oscar Lewenstein
Cast: Michael Crawford, Rita Tushingham, Ray Brooks,Donal Donnelly

©1965 Woodfall Films
Released on MGM video (NTSC format) M203130

Audio

The Deep Blue Sea

Author: Terence Rattigan
Cast includes: Alexandra Gilbraith, Hugh Quarshie
Producer: Mary Peat
©BBC 2000
Broadcast BBC Radio Four 24 April 2000.

Moonlight

Author: Harold Pinter
Cast includes: Harold Pinter, Douglas Hodge
Producer: Janet Whitaker
©BBC 2000
Broadcast BBC Radio Three 8 October 2000.

Productions

An Inspector Calls

Playwright: J.B. Priestley
Director: Stephen Daldry
Company/Producer: PW Productions (Royal National Theatre
Venue: Theatre Royal Bath
Cast includes: Mark McGann, Denis Lill, Marjorie Yates, Helen Franklin
Date viewed: 18 September 1999

Ashes to Ashes

Playwright: Harold Pinter
Director: Harold Pinter
Company/Producer: Royal Court
Venue: Royal Court Theatre Upstairs (Ambassadors Theatre, London WC2)
Cast: Lindsay Duncan, Stephen Rea
Date viewed: 13 and 21 September 1996

Betrayal

Playwright: Harold Pinter
Director: Trevor Nunn
Company/Producer: National Theatre
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bath
Cast includes: Douglas Hodge, Anthony Calf, Imogen Stubbs
Date viewed: 26 and 30 January 1999

The Birthday Party

Playwright: Harold Pinter
Director: JoeHarmston
Company/Producer: Theatre Royal Bath Productions, Salisbury Playhouse
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bath
Cast: Barry Jackson, Prunella Scales, Steven Pacey, Timothy West, Nigel Terry, Lisa Dulson
Date viewed: 13 and 17 April 1999

The Browning Version

Playwright: Terence Rattigan
Director: Michael Napier Brown
Company/Producer: Theatre Royal Bath Productions
Venue: Theatre Royal Bath
Cast: Edward Fox, Sally Edwards, Polly Maberly
Date viewed: 27 May 2000

Celebration

Playwright: Harold Pinter
Director: Harold Pinter
Company/Producer: Almeida Theatre
Venue: Almeida Theatre, Islington, London
Cast: Lia Williams, Steven Pacey, Lindsay Duncan, Keith Allen, Danny Dyer
Date viewed: 1 April 2000 (Presented with *The Room*)

The Collection

Playwright: Harold Pinter
Director: Joe Harmston
Company/Producer: Donmar Warehouse
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bath
Cast: Harold Pinter, Douglas Hodge, Lia Williams, Colin McFarlane
Date viewed: 20 June 1998 (Presented with *The Lover*)

Denial

Playwright: Arnold Wesker
Director: Andy Hay
Company/Producer: Bristol Old Vic
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bristol Old Vic
Cast includes: Nicola Barber, Rosemary McHale, Jeremy Child
Date viewed: 2 June 2000

The Dumb Waiter

Playwright: Harold Pinter
Director: Matthew Taylor
Company/Producer: Escape Artists
Venue: Rondo Theatre, Bath
Cast: Simon Hyde, Paul Malcolm
Date viewed: 29 March 1997

The Ghost Train

Playwright: Arnold Ridley
Director: Ian Hastings
Company/Producer: Bristol Old Vic
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bristol Old Vic
Cast includes: Ian Lavender, Simon Cook, Lucy Sullivan, Hugh Simon
Date viewed: 6 June 1998

The Gin Game

Playwright: D.L. Coburn
Director: Frith Banbury
Company/Producer: TEG Productions, Cambridge Arts Theatre
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bath
Cast: Dorothy Tutin, Joss Ackland
Date viewed: 25 September 1999

A Kind of Alaska

Playwright: Harold Pinter
Director: Karel Reisz
Company/Producer: Gate Theatre
Venue: Gate Theatre, Dublin
Cast: Penelope Wilton, Jim Norton, Bernadette McKenna
Date viewed: 18 April 1997

The Late Middle Classes

Playwright: Simon Gray
Director: Harold Pinter
Company/Producer: Palace Theatre Watford, Ambassador Theatre Group
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bath
Cast includes: Harriet Walter, James Fleet, Nicholas Woodeson
Date viewed: 8 May 1999

Life Support

Playwright: Simon Gray
Director: Harold Pinter
Company/Producer: Duncan Weldon, Yvonne Arnaud Theatre Guildford
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bath
Cast includes: Alan Bates, Georgina Hale, Nikolas Grace
Date viewed: 5 July 1997

Look Back in Anger

Playwright: John Osborne
Director: Gregory Hersov
Company/Producer: National Theatre
Venue: Lyttelton Theatre
Cast includes: Michael Sheen, Emma Fielding, Matilda Ziegler, William Gaunt
Date viewed: 14 August 1999

Look Back in Anger

Playwright: John Osborne
Director: Gareth Machin
Company/Producer: Bristol Old Vic
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bristol
Cast includes: Nick Moran, Helen Franklin, Denis Lill
Date viewed: 17 March 2001

The Lover

Playwright: Harold Pinter
Director: Corinne Spencer
Company/Producer: Theatre West
Venue: Alma Tavern, Bristol
Cast: Tony O'Callaghan, Sarah Menage
Date viewed: 25 April 1998

The Lover

Playwright: Harold Pinter
Director: Joe Harmston
Company/Producer: Donmar Warehouse
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bath
Cast: Douglas Hodge, Lia Williams, Colin McFarlane
Date viewed: 20 June 1998 (Presented with *The Collection*)

The Mousetrap

Playwright: Agatha Christie
Director: David Turner
Company/Producer: Mousetrap Productions
Venue: St Martin's Theatre, London WC2
Cast includes: Maev Alexander, Michael Remick, Lynden Endwards
Date viewed: 5 September 1996

The Mousetrap

Playwright: Agatha Christie
Director: David Turner
Company/Producer: Mousetrap Productions
Venue: St Martin's Theatre, London WC2
Cast includes: Susanna Northen, Michael Remick, Richard Teverson
Date viewed: 7 January 1999

Private Lives

Playwright: Noel Coward
Director: Philip Franks
Company/Producer: National Theatre
Venue: Theatre Royal, Bath
Cast includes: Anton Lesser, Juliet Stevenson, Dominic Rowan
Date viewed: 17 July 1999

The Room

Playwright: Harold Pinter
Director: Harold Pinter
Company/Producer: Almeida Theatre
Venue: Almeida Theatre, Islington, London
Cast: Lia Williams, Steven Pacey, Lindsay Duncan, Keith Allen, Henry Woolf
Date viewed: 1 April 2000 (Presented with *Celebration*)